AMD RADEON 295X2
The world's most powerful graphics card tested

HEARTHSTONE
A different kind of Warcraft

ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE
MMO saviour or too little too late?

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

PC PowerPlay

ISSUE #228

SOMA
Amnesia's developers find horror under the sea

TANKATHON
Tales from the World of Tanks global championship

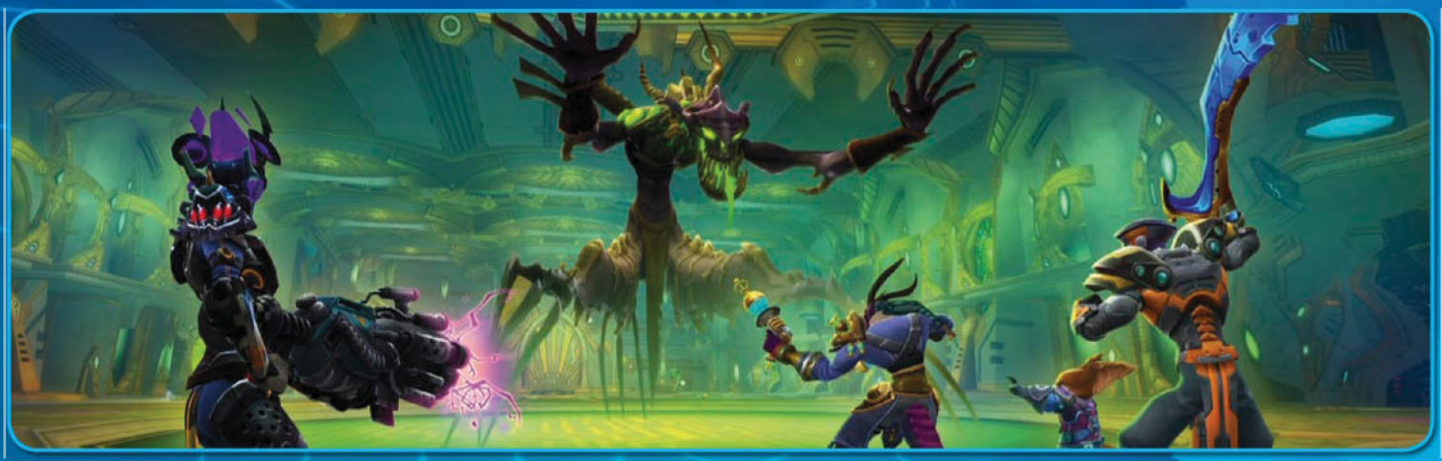
SID MEIER'S
BEYOND EARTH
What happens when Civilization ends

WILDSTAR®
AVAILABLE 03.06.14

DISCOVER THE LEGENDARY PLANET NEXUS

Blast off for an epic adventure of galactic proportions! Choose a side and fight for control of Nexus, while uncovering the secrets of the hyper-advanced Eldan that disappeared from the planet long ago.

DYNAMIC COMBAT • CUSTOMIZABLE HOUSING • INFINITE ADVENTURE



PRE-ORDER NOW!

FOR EXCLUSIVE BONUS ITEMS:

- » **Exclusive Rocket House**
- » **3 Day Head Start**
- » **Exclusive Housing Trophy**
- » **In-game Storage Bag**
- » **Pre-Order Title**

...And more!

M | Fantasy Violence, gambling and alcohol themes; Online content variable

www.WildStar-Online.com

©2011–2014 NCSOFT Corporation. All rights reserved. WildStar, NCSOFT, the interlocking NC Logo, Carbine Studios, and all associated logos and designs are trademarks or registered trademarks of NCSOFT Corporation. All other trademarks or registered trademarks are property of their respective owners.

NCSOFT® Carbine STUDIOS™

CORSAIR®
corsair.com

"Keyboard of the Year."

PC POWER PLAY, MARCH 2014, ISSUE#225

facebook.com/Corsair @CorsairMemory youtube.com/CorsairMemoryInc

Logo is a trademark of Future US, Inc. and is used with permission. © 2014 Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Quote reprinted with permission.

CORSAIR
VENGEANCE

K70

Assert. Surpass. Defeat.

When you're playing to win you need tools, not toys. Pro gamers around the world are making the K70 their weapon of choice because of its unprecedented combination of performance, comfort, durability, and style. If you've gotten yours, you know. And if you haven't, you've probably been beaten by someone who has.

Learn lots more at: corsair.com/K70

DURABLE ANODIZED BRUSHED ALUMINUM CHASSIS

AVAILABLE WITH CHERRY MX RED, BROWN, OR BLUE KEYSWITCHES

KEY-BY-KEY CUSTOMIZABLE BACKLIGHTING

Corsair Vengeance K70 is built with original Cherry MX keyswitches, the #1 choice of gamers. Made in Germany with unequaled precision using real gold cross-point contacts, Cherry MX keyswitches have proven performance and consistency with over 5 billion in use around the world.

CHERRY MX RED
Ultra-fast, ultra-smooth linear response

CHERRY MX BROWN
Silent, with light tactile feedback

CHERRY MX BLUE
Tactile feedback with an audible click

CHERRY

WorldMags.net

CONTENTS

BEYOND EARTH

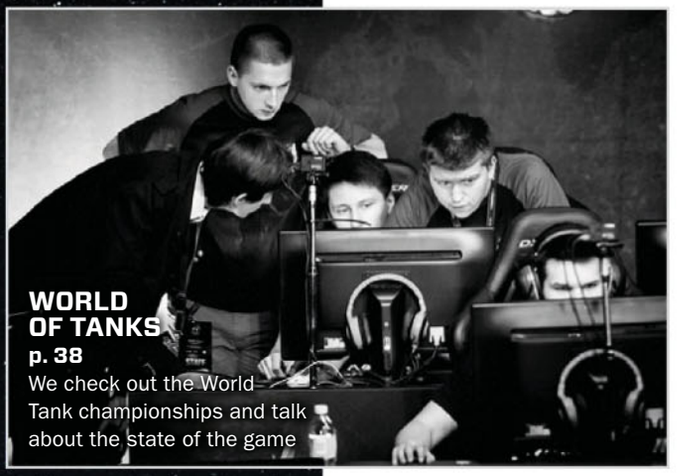
p. 32

Firaxis returns to ask what happens after Civ

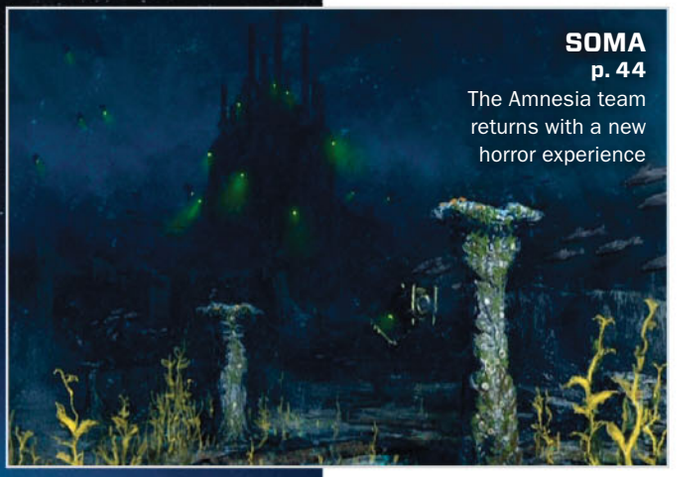
WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

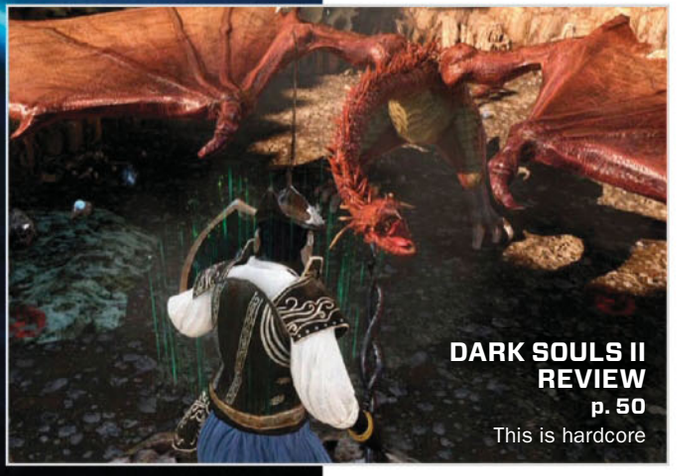
INTERVIEW
p. 20
Former People Can Fly developers Get Even



WORLD OF TANKS
p. 38
We check out the World Tank championships and talk about the state of the game



SOMA
p. 44
The Amnesia team returns with a new horror experience



DARK SOULS II REVIEW
p. 50
This is hardcore

FRONTEND
15 Release Schedule
18 WishingWell
22 PCPP Interview: Get Even

OPINION
24 Source Code
26 JAM
28 Generation XX

FEATURES
32 Beyond Earth
38 World of Tanks
44 GDC Previews

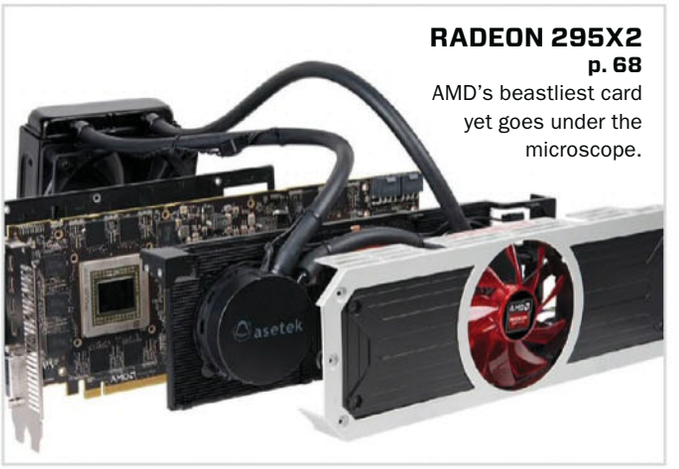
GAME REVIEWS
50 Dark Souls II
54 Hearthstone
56 The Elder Scrolls Online
60 Child of Light
63 Cardhunter: Attack of the Artifacts

TECH
70 Radeon HD 295x2
74 Hotware
76 My PC
78 MSI GTX 750 Ti OC Edition
78 Palit Storm GTX 750 Ti
79 Noctua NH-D15
80 ADATA DDR3 3100
80 Crucial Ballistix Tactical
82 Thecus N2310 NAS
82 FRITZ!Box 8490
84 Fractal Design Node 804
84 Corsair Raptor M40
86 Menagerie

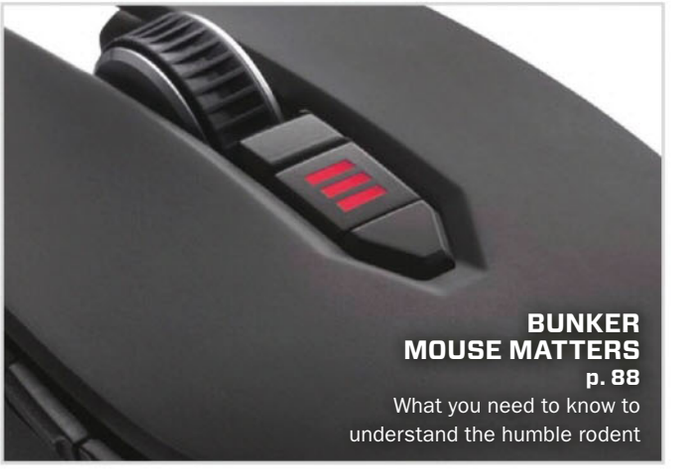
THE BUNKER
88 Mouse matters

STATE OF PLAY
91 Football manager
92 Play, Review, Critique
96 Extended Memory: Civilization

REGULARS
10 Inbox
64 Subscriptions
98 Next Month



RADEON 295X2
p. 68
AMD's beastliest card yet goes under the microscope.



BUNKER MOUSE MATTERS
p. 88
What you need to know to understand the humble rodent

WorldMags.net

msi®

MSI recommends Windows 8.

GAMING G SERIES

GS70 Stealth Pro

INCREDIBLY THIN

World's thinnest and lightest 17" gaming notebook

MSI GS70 Stealth Pro powered by
Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

steelseries ENGINE

Customize every key or device to personalize your play style

XSplit Gamecaster

The best recording and live streaming app for gamers

NVIDIA GeForce GTX 870M

The newest NVIDIA GeForce GTX 870M graphics card

Super RAID 2

3 SSD RAID provides15X faster than tradition HDD's speed

Killer E2200 GAME NETWORKING

The fastest lan solution for online gaming

intel inside™ CORE™ i7

WHERE TO BUY

Top Player · Top Choice

NSW	Capitol Computer	http://www.capitolcomputer.com.au	(02) 9281 8890
	Kong Computers	http://www.kongcomputers.com/	1300 159 272
	MSY	http://www.msy.com.au/	(02) 9648 4116
	Mwave	http://www.mwave.com.au/	1300 727 446
	Tech Buy	http://www.techbuy.com.au/	(02) 9648 1818
	Umart	http://www.umart.com.au/	(02) 9099 2688
	Wireless1	http://www.wireless1.com.au/	(02) 9687 8828
VIC	Budget PC	https://budgetpc.com.au/	(03) 9541 9000
	Centrecom	http://www.centrecom.com.au/	(03) 8311 7651
	CPL	http://www.cplonline.com.au/	(03) 8542 8688
	Landmark Computers	http://www.lmc.com.au/	(03) 9600 2244
	MSY	http://www.msy.com.au/	(03) 9560 2288
	PC Case Gear	http://www.pccasegear.com/	(03) 9560 2122
	Prototech Computers	http://prototech.com.au/	(03) 5444 1980
	Scorptec	http://www.scorptec.com.au/	(03) 8561 3206
	Standard Computers	http://www.standard.com.au/	(03) 9315 1234
	Tecs	http://www.tecs.com.au/	(03) 9602 3499
	Umart	http://www.umart.com.au/	(03) 9590 8688
QLD	Computer Alliance	http://www.computeralliance.com.au/	(07) 3421 3200
	Computer Function	http://www.computerfunction.com.au/	(07) 3720 4777
	GameDude Computers	http://www.gamedude.com.au	(07) 3387 1500
	MSY	http://www.msy.com.au/	(07) 3217 9070
	Umart	http://www.umart.com.au/	(07) 3369 3928
WA	Affordable Laptops	http://www.affordablelaptops.com.au/	(08) 6461 6836
	MSY	http://www.msy.com.au/	(08) 9344 1002
	PLE	http://www.ple.com.au/	(08) 9309 4771
SA	Getright Computers	http://www.getright.com.au	(08) 8231 0622
	MSY	http://www.msy.com.au/	(08) 8212 1656
NZL	Computer Lounge	Computer Lounge	(09) 368 4818
	Just Laptops	Just Laptops	0800 587 852
	Playtech	Playtech	(09) 415 1020

http://www.facebook.com/msiaus

http://gaming.msi.com/

Intel, the Intel Logo, Intel Inside, Intel Core, and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

PC PowerPlay
100% AUSTRALIAN CONTENT
www.pcpowerplay.com.au

EDITORIAL
MANAGING EDITOR David Hollingworth
dhollingworth@nextmedia.com.au
EDITOR John Gillooly
jgillooly@nextmedia.com.au
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Malcolm Campbell
mcampbell@nextmedia.com.au
DESIGNER Oliver Barles
obarles@nextmedia.com.au
TECH EDITOR Bennett Ring
bennettr@internode.on.net
INTERN Alex Mann
gamesintern@nextmedia.com.au

CONTRIBUTORS
James Cottee, Anthony Fordham, Terrence Jarrad, James O'Connor, Meghann O'Neill, Patrick Stafford, Daniel Wilks, Theo, Morte

ADVERTISING
GROUP NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER GAMING
Cameron Ferris
cferris@nextmedia.com.au
02 9901 6348
M: 0405 356 419

ADVERTISING TRAFFIC
Alison Begg
abegg@nextmedia.com.au
02 9901 6346

PRODUCTION MANAGER Alison Begg
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Carole Jones

SUBSCRIPTIONS
www.mymagazines.com.au
TOLL FREE **1300 361 146**
Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590
COVER DISC ENQUIRIES:
jgillooly@nextmedia.com.au
02 9901 6100

nextmedia
Building A, Level 6
207 Pacific Highway
St Leonards, NSW 2065
Locked Bag 5555,
St Leonards, NSW 1590

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
David Gardiner
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
Bruce Duncan

PC PowerPlay is published by nextmedia Pty Ltd ACN: 128 805 970, Building A, Level 6, 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065 © 2011. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publisher. Printed by Webstar Sydney, Distributed in Australia by Network Services. ISSN 1326-5644. The publisher will not accept responsibility or any liability for the correctness of information or opinions expressed in the publication. All material submitted is at the owner's risk and, while every care will be taken nextmedia does not accept liability for loss or damage.

Privacy Policy

We value the integrity of your personal information. If you provide personal information through your participation in any competitions, surveys or offers featured in this issue of PC PowerPlay, this will be used to provide the products or services that you have requested and to improve the content of our magazines. Your details may be provided to third parties who assist us in this purpose. In the event of organisations providing prizes or offers to our readers, we may pass your details on to them. From time to time, we may use the information you provide us to inform you of other products, services and events our company has to offer. We may also give your information to other organisations which may use it to inform you about their products, services and events, unless you tell us not to do so. You are welcome to access the information that we hold about you by getting in touch with our privacy officer, who can be contacted at nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590

SMACdown

I used to think the jaw-dropping was pure cliche, something that never happened outside of cartoons from days gone by. It was a belief that I held sacred right up until I watched it happen twice in a day, both times when I told colleagues here about what we had in store for this issue.

I didn't truly appreciate the sheer pull that the phrase 'spiritual successor to Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri' held until these uncontrolled falls of the mandible that occured when the news broke. Even weeks later, when the intro video for the game was finally unveiled, social media filled up with the most unlikely of sorts professing to stirrings in both the heart, and in the case of one of my more disturbing friends, the pants, when they saw the pre-rendered CGI Intro.

The mere fact that Beyond Earth is a thing makes me a very happy gamer indeed. Civilization is in many ways one of gaming's great anomalies, a turn based 4X strategy game that enjoys legitimate blockbuster status, one that has forever broken the shackles of a stubborn niche and captured the hearts and minds of many gamers, gamers of all walks and preferences.

With this rarified status in mind, there is always the worry that Civ will settle further into its rut and that the powers that be will prevent the designers from messing with it. In other words, the franchise does have the danger of becoming Call of Duty, a series made increasingly soulless by its too big to fail nature. CoD is in a feedback loop, giving the fans exactly what they want and never straying from the formula laid down with Modern Warfare.

Instead of going down this path, kudos to Take2 and Firaxis for letting the team try something different, for stepping away from the guaranteed revenue that Civ 6 would bring and instead allowing the team to deliver something different. From what I've seen and heard from Firaxis so far, the game looks so much deeper than I'd initially feared, with the team using the breaking of the shackles of history to flex their muscles and deploy a wide variety of new and expanded game systems. It is a game that is shaping up to be wonderful, and more importantly, is capturing the hearts and minds of a public in ways noone really expected.

Here's hoping that after the playing it safe of recent years, game publishers might be willing to take more chances like Beyond Earth (and before it, XCOM). There is clearly an audience for such titles, and I for one am sick of a dozen new open world shooters being announced every time a major games conference occurs.

John Gillooly
Editor
@labsmonkey

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"But can you put cannons on a motorbike?"

"Kevin Spacey? Well the dogs failed then"

"No, You have to mulligan those Legendaries "

WorldMags.net

inbox

WorldMags.net

Lol. CoDbots

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Write in to PCPP with your rants, considered opinions, and endless run-on sentences of pure awesome. The address is letters@pcpowerplay.com.au. Each letter read by hand!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Love the mag, love the articles & writing, however slightly confused about the scoring in issue#227 for Titanfall, getting a 7 despite David Hollingworth's excellently written four page review positively falling over itself to gush praise on the effort from breakaway CoDBot devs, where the only negative appears to be "perhaps a little too polished"... and references such as "If ...those giant robots only had a little more heart".Now I've seen PCPP typos-a-plenty and bad grammar which I can put down to rushed editions, which leads me to ask is a score of 7 for real here?

That's normally something you give to a slightly above average experience which is playable if you overlook some bugs or controller/performance issues, but certainly not to what sounds like a great multiplayer FPS by AAA devs which, if anything, is substantively bug-free? Perhaps I am missing an industry in-joke where CoD vs BF4 review scoring battles occur on an abstract plane between cabals of gaming mag reviewers?

Morte

One thing I've learned over the years when reviews come in is to ask the author are you sure? In this case David had initially given the game 7.5, both a perfect piece of fencesitting and a score incompatible with the PCPP system. We discussed it, and David decided it be rounded down not up. I warned him that there would be letters about it but he stood by it. Despite Titanfall being a well polished game, all those smooth edges added up to something lacking in oomph, and with some niggling issues like the need for other players to complete the campaign. Plus, his cabal-determined opposite number in the Battlefield 4 vs CoD review wars gave BF4 a 7, so he had no choice.

GAMES AS SPORT

Years ago i picked up a PC PowerPlay mag for the first time and came across a section called the veldt. It showed me my beginnings of professional play, with a piece on professional Starcraft: Brood War in South Korea. That piece got me so excited for what was to come that i've followed Starcraft 2 professional scene from then on ever since.

I never knew what it was like to be a sport fanatic, but since i became an e-sports fanatic i've had hundreds of hours of great fun and memory's including many i think i'll keep forever.

My question is this.

Since 2010 and the rise of SC2, LoL, Dota2 and recently counterstrike: GO, (all PC games i might add) have taken competitive gaming to unprecedented levels.

A stadium with 11 000 people as spectators sold out in march in Poland, and ESL is hosting a Dota 2 tournament in Frankfurt Germany in a football stadium where they're expecting 35 000 people to be in attendance.

And the players you interviewed back then (Baby now known as TY for the team KTRoslter) still plays.

Maybe it's time professional Gaming and Esports made a return to magazine where i first discovered it.

Bodie Urane

The hows and whys of eSports coverage is an issue that we have talked at length about here in the PCPP offices. It is a tricky subject, and one that sometimes gets a disproportionate amount of focus in the games industry in general. The big question is, especially with such an extensive online presence, why we should dedicate precious page space to eSports. A lot of the time working out what to exclude from each issue of the magazine is much more difficult than working out what goes in, and we feel that, for now, occasional eSports coverage is a better option than ongoing coverage of it month to month. This month, for example, we have coverage of the recent global World of Tanks championship in Poland, one of the most significant events in the ever expanding eSports world. Which begs the other big question. If we do cover eSports regularly, which one do we focus on. Do we prioritise dota 2 over LoL, World of Tanks over Starcraft, CoD over CounterStrike? What are the most important ones? How do we decided which should be covered from month to month given that we would only be able to dedicate a few pages? And most importantly how many of you want more eSports in the magazine. If there is enough demand anything is possible.

WorldMags.net

ASRock®

9-Series Motherboard

COMPUTEX TAIPEI
ASRock
June 3rd-7th
4F Nangang Hall L1018

Super Alloy

Motherboard

Stable and Reliable

Super Alloy Components

The Extra Large Heatsinks Dramatically Take Away Heat and Cool Down MOSFETs & Chipsets

The New-Gen Alloy Chokes Make the Motherboard More Efficient, Stable and Reliable

Stacking 2 Silicon Dies Into 1 MOSFET Extreme Low Rds(on) – 1.2 mΩ Offering The Coolest Temperature & Most Efficient Power Delivery

The Next-Gen MOSFET Lower Rds(on) 2.9 mΩ Lower Temperature Higher Efficiency

Supreme 12K Platinum Caps The Industry's Longest Lifespan – 12,000 Hours

ALTECH COMPUTERS
www.altech.com.au

ACHIEVA GROUP OF COMPANIES
www.achieva.com.au

INGRAM MICRO® Partner Smart

NSW

ARC Computers	02 9748 8322	arc.com.au
Aus PC Market	02 9646 8000	auspc.com.au
Capitol Computer	02 9281 8890	capitolcomputer.com.au
IIBuy	02 9599 0698	iibuy.com.au
IJK	02 9745 0877	ijk.com.au
Megaware Computer	02 9698 1593	megaware.com.au
MSY	02 9755 0668	msy.com.au
mWave	1300 727 446	mwave.com.au
Nexcom	02 4721 3457	dcomponline.com.au
North Shore Computers	02 9939 1548	nscom.com.au
PC Lan	02 9649 3288	pclan.com.au
PC Meal	02 9746 7686	pcmeal.com.au
D & D COMPUTER TECH.	02 9742 3988	ddcomputer.com.au
DIY COMPUTERS	02 9897 9993	diycomputers.com.au
MAIG PTY LTD.	02 9648 2261	maig.com.au
J&W	02 8090 3332	jw.com.au

QLD

Computer Alliance Pty Ltd	07 3420 3200	computeralliance.com.au
Game Dude Pty Ltd	07 3387 1500	gamedude.com.au
MSY	07 3290 1738	msy.com.au
Umart Online	07 3369 3928	umart.com.au
AUSCOMP COMPUTERS	07 3722 5100	auscompcomputers.com

VIC

Computers & Parts Land	03 8542 8688	cpl.net.au
MSY Technology	03 9560 2288	msy.com.au
PC Case Gear	03 9551 0889	pccasegear.com
Centre Com Sunshine PTY	03 8311 7600	centrecom.com.au
Scorpion Tech. Computers	03 8561 3200	scorptec.com.au

NT

PC Solutions 4 U	08 89412119	pcsolutions4u.com.au

TAS

Principal Computers	03 6235 5000	tasmanianpc.com.au

WA

Austin Computer	08 9201 2788	austin.net.au
MSY	08 9344 1002	msy.com.au
Netway Computers	08 9332 0888	netwaycomputers.com
Netplus Micro Computers	08 9242 7288	netplus.com.au
PC West	08 6398 4813	pcwest.com.au
PLE Computers	08 9309 4771	ple.com.au
Worldwide Net Solutions	08 9375 9666	netsolution.com.au
ARROW COMPUTERS	08 9258 7733	arrowcomputers.com.au

SA

Hypernet Computer Distribution	08 8340 2021	hypernetdist.com.au
MATS Systems	08 8186 2110	mats-systems.com.au
MSY Technology (SA) Pty Ltd	08 8212 1656	msy.com.au
IT&Computers	08 8186 2736	itwarehouse.com.au
Photech Computers Pty Ltd	08 8349 4334	photech.com.au

▪ The specification is subject to change without notice. ▪ The brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies. ▪ Any configuration other than original product specification is not guaranteed.

www.asrock.com

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

PC PowerPlay

COMPS

Welcome to the PCPP competitions page! With the office positively overflowing in PC gaming goodies, it's become so difficult to do our ridiculously awesome jobs that we decided to pass the savings onto you. And by savings, we mean free stuff. Games, collectibles, swag, and all kinds of media that screams PC gaming. Or perhaps those are the screams of the intern trapped under the boxes of giveaways. Only one way to save them:

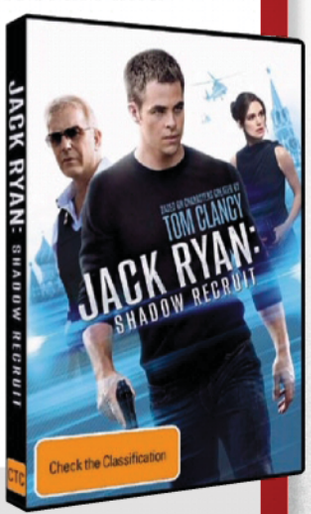
Head to **www.pcpowerplay.com.au to enter**!

To find the competitions, simply mouse over the "Community" tab in the main menu at the top of the homepage, and click on "Competitions". Click through to each individual competition page, fill out the form (be sure to agree to the terms and conditions) and you'll be in the running to win! Keep an eye out for this page in future issues of PCPP, as we roll out new competitions every month!

WIN

5 COPIES TO WIN! 2 MAJOR WINNERS + 3 RUNNERS UP

Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit and Splinter Cell Blacklist Packs



To celebrate the release of Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit on Blu-ray and DVD we have three copies on DVD to give away plus two packs including the DVD, Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Blacklist; The 5th Freedom Edition for PC and Jack Ryan hidden camera pen, iPhone and iPad cases.

© 2013 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved.

TO ENTER:

Head to **www.pcpowerplay.com.au**
In 25 words or less, answer the following question:

▶ ***If you were a Tom Clancy movie, what name would it have?***

WIN

10 COPIES TO WIN!

47 Ronin

Faster than you can say Whoa, Keanu takes Samurai Mythology and turns it on its head with this tale of the supernatural and dudes with swords. To celebrate the release on Blu-Ray we have 10 copies to give away.

TO ENTER:

Head to **www.pcpowerplay.com.au**
In 25 words or less, answer the following question:

▶ ***If you were the 48th Ronin, what would your special ability be and why?***

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of nextmedia Pty Ltd and the agencies associated with any promotion. 2. Entrants under the age of 18 must obtain the prior consent of a parent or legal guardian to enter. 3. Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 4. Entry is by fulfilling criteria noted with the competition. Competitions are games of skill and chance plays no part in determining winners. 5. Competition begins at 22.05.14. Entries close at 20.06.14. In determining eligibility the judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 6. Judging will take place on 24.06.14 at nextmedia Pty Ltd. 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards, NSW 2065. 7. Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 8. The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 9. The winners of prizes over $100 will be published online at www.pcpowerplay.com.au. Allow four to six weeks for delivery of prizes from time of print. 10. Comps are as follows: Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit. Total prize value is $520.25. Two winners will receive 1x copy Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit on DVD, 1 x Splinter Cell Blacklist: The 5th Freedom Edition for PC, 1 x Hidden Camera Pen, 1 x iPhone case and 1 x iPad Case. Three runners up will recieve 1 x copy of Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit. 47 Ronin: Total prize value is $449.50. Ten winners will receive 1 x 47 Ronin on Blu-Ray/Ultraviolet from Universal Sony. 11. By entering entrants agree to release, discharge and hold harmless nextmedia Pty Ltd., participating promoters and their affiliates, subsidiaries, advertising and promotional agencies and prize suppliers from all claims and damages arising out of entrants' participations in this sweepstakes and/or acceptance of any prize. 12. The promoter is nextmedia Pty Ltd ABN 84 128 805 970 of Level 6, Building A, 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065.

PRIVACY NOTICE: We value the integrity of your personal information. If you provide personal information through your participation in any competitions, surveys or offers featured in this issue of PC PowerPlay this will be used to provide the products or services that you have requested and to improve the content of our magazines. Your details may be provided to third parties who assist us in this purpose. In the event of organisations providing prizes or offers to our readers, we may pass your details on to them. From time to time, we may use the information you provide us to inform you of other products, services and events our company has to offer. We may also give your information to other organisations which may use it to inform you about their products, services and events, unless you tell us not to do so. You are welcome to access the information that we hold about you by getting in touch with our privacy officer, who can be contacted at nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590.

GIGABYTE™

Insist on Ultra Durable™
Lasting Quality from GIGABYTE

G1 GAMING

I AM A GAMER
I AM G1

GIGABYTE 9 Series
G1 GAMING
Motherboards

SUPPORTS intel inside CORE™ intel inside CHIPSET Z97

*Product features may vary by model. *Motherbaord models may vary based on local distribution.

www.gigabyte.com.au

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

FRONTEND

THIS MONTH...

JOHN GILLOOLY
Squeeled with delight over Beyond Earth
@labsmonkey

MALCOLM CAMPBELL
Made Space look cool

OLIVER BARLES
Is on his third visit to Drangleic

BENNETT RING
Needs a bigger backpack.
@bennettring

JAMES COTTEE
Got even
@j_cottee

MEGHANN O'NEILL
Developed reviewers remorse
@firkraags

ALEX MANN
Had the Guts to kill a 100 soldiers

DAVID HOLLINGWORTH
Traded principles for Kevin Spacey.
@atomicmpc

DANIEL WILKS
Became a child of light
@drwilkenstein

CAMERON FERRIS
Moved a big walking carpet out of the way
@pcpowerplay

34 Beyond Earth

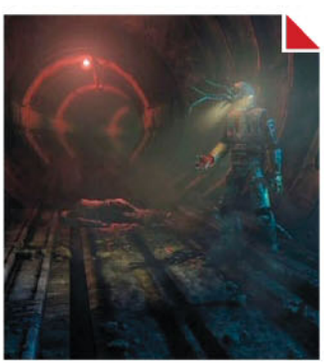
Take a look at what is next for Civilization, a journey to the stars that opens up all sorts of new frontiers.

38 World of Tanks

The free to play game comes of age as an e-Sport, and we went to Poland to see what all the fuss is about.

22 PCPP Interview

Dont get mad, Get Even



46 GDC 2014

Patrick Stafford takes a look at Soma and a crop of games from newcomer my.com.

WorldMags.net

THE RELEASE SCHEDULE

Looking ahead to the upcoming PC game releases

LEGEND: Steam | Origin | Good Old Games | uPlay | Download | Retail

MAY

10TH
BOUND BY FLAME
SPIDERS, $39.99

20TH
WOLFENSTEIN: NEW ORDER
MACHINE GAMES, $79.95

24TH
KILLER IS DEAD
DEEP SILVER, $TBA

24TH
TROPICO 5
HAEMIMONT STUDIOS, $39.99

27TH
WATCH DOGS
UBISOFT MONTREAL, $59.99

JUNE

2ND
WILDSTAR
CARBINE STUDIOS, $59.99

3RD
INFINITY RUNNER
WALES INTERACTIVE, $TBA

3RD
MURDERED SOUL SUSPECT
AIRTIGHT GAMES, $59.99

24TH
PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE
POPCAP GAMES, $34.99

27TH
SNIPER ELITE III
REBELLION, $59.99

Q3

SACRED 3
KEEN GAMES, $TBA

THE EVIL WITHIN
TANGO GAMEWORKS, $79.95

ULTIMATE NARUTO
ICEGAMES CO. LTD, $TBA

Q4

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION
BIOWARE, $89.99

MIDDLE EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR
MONOLITH, $TBA

ALIEN: ISOLATION
THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY, $TBA

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS, $TBA

Borderlands: the Pre-Sequel

DEVELOPER 2K AUSTRALIA
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
DUE Q3 2014
www.borderlandsthegame.com

After so many teases and nudges towards Borderlands 2 DLC set on Handsome Jack's Moonbase, we now have to wait for the pre-sequel to land later this year. Not only will it unveil more of Handsome Jacks not so handsome backstoy, but it will give us a chance to play as some of his major henchmen, rather than the usual pesky array of vault hunters.

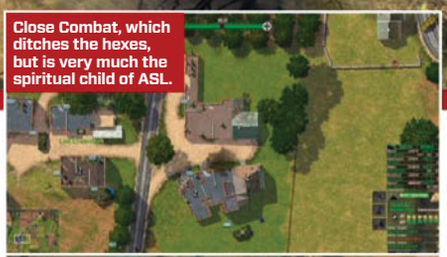
WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

Sure, it's pretty, but what the hell are those Katyushas doing so close to the main line of battle?!?

TO SIMULATE, OR NOT TO SIMULATE – THAT IS THE QUESTION

Also, is it nobler to tank-rush or turtle, and do such tactics even have a place in 'real' military sims.



Close Combat, which ditches the hexes, but is very much the spiritual child of ASL.

Now THAT'S wargaming!

I am very excited.

As I write this, I'm nervously awaiting my initiation into a select club of old, hairy gamers. I have dreamed of this moment; played games inspired by this ur-game. Long have I pondered what mysteries may await me.

Yes. Soon, a friend of mine will be teaching me to play Advanced Squad Leader, the Mother of All Wargames.

ASL, as it's known to those in the know, is a curious beast. It's a 'mere' tabletop wargame that utilises cardboard counters and hexmaps to recreate World War II warfare. It's nearly 30 years old, so it may seem a bit quaint, but its extreme dedication to realism and true simulation is legendary.

It also features a complete ruleset that can be measured in feet thick rather than pages, and the bigger games have been known to consume entire small forests' worth of paper and cardboard.

No wonder then, that some bright spark thought it may be perfect fodder for conversion into a computer game. Thus was born the venerable Close Combat franchise, a game that is close to my heart, and heavily driven by ASL's sense of realism.

The wargaming Gods must have a sense of timing, because I've also recently been playing in the closed beta test of Close Combat: Gateway to Normandy, and I'm really looking forward to getting the chance to play the game that's behind Matrix Games' strategy series. Which has also got me thinking about how accuracy, gameplay, and balance – that all important bugbear of multiplayer gaming – interact when it comes to making great military sims.

For me, I love detail, and I love accuracy. This is the reason that games like Close Combat and the excellent and supremely detailed Combat Mission appeal to me – they're almost slavish recreations of the battlefield. In Combat Mission, for instance, hits on armoured vehicles are measured in such detail that a single impact might cause spalling of the tank's interior (and thus possibly wound the crew), while the round still ricochets off and impacts elsewhere. In Close Combat, if you pay attention to what a single squad is doing, you'll see the ammo counts dropping, each soldier's state of mind as the battle rages, and even see squaddies picking up discarded weapons from nearby corpses if the fight goes on long enough.

It's like commanding real troops!

But of course, these games are about simulation, with balance coming a distant second.

But balance is all important for competitive games, especially those who wish to seek a wider audience. In all my years of playing the two Combat games, and spending a lot of time on various fora, I don't think I've ever heard anyone clamouring to nerf a particular vehicle. Yet you'll hear that a lot from players of games like World of Tanks or even Company of Heroes. These titles are built around the idea of balanced multiplayer that presents a level playing field between players. It's much like any points-based table top wargame – such as Warhammer 40,000 – where the points set the armies fielded, and are meant to ensure a certain (on paper at least) level of parity between armies.

Which is not to say balance and accuracy can't exist side-by-side. Competitive games of both Combat Mission and Close Combat can work of points-based systems, so some idea of how units stack up comparatively is important. However, the players who play these games – and their table-top counterparts, like ASL – will often be more interested in recreating something closer to real battlefield conditions. Here, the idea of balance is anathema to the way real battles play out, and historical Orders of Battle rarely add up to equal points in any gaming system.

Now that I think about it, it says a lot about what I like in a game. I love list-building in tabletop games, and there's something great about games with awesome balance that really run on a knife-edge between the players. Look at Starcraft – for most people, it's the finely-honed competitive play that people remember; for me, though, there's no greater piece of awesomeness in the entire franchise than the classic Desperate Alliance mission of the singleplayer campaign, where you're hopelessly outnumbered and have to survive for 30 minutes.

Probably why I have a thing for the Red Devils holding out around Arnhem Bridge, too... *DAVID HOLLINGWORTH* PC

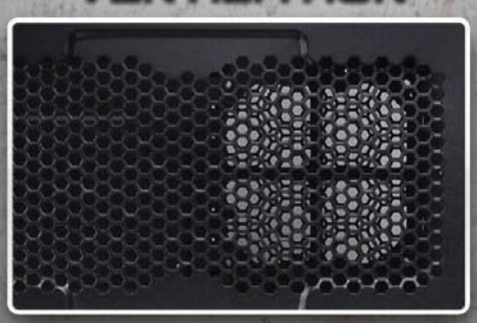
WorldMags.net

Versa
H SERIES

QUALITY
WITHOUT THE EXPENSE

SILENT
500WATT PSU

OPTIMIZED
VENTILATION



TOOLESS
INSTALLATION

Thermaltake
COOLall YOUR LIFE

LIKE US ON
FACEBOOK

visit thermaltake.com.au for more info

WorldMags.net

POLES APART

WHO WOJTEK PAZDUR
WHERE THE FARM 51
WHY GET EVEN

Polish indie developer The Farm 51 dazzled gamers worldwide with the teaser trailer for Get Even, a radical new take on the FPS genre. We sat down with director of development **WOJTEK PAZDUR** to talk about the gritty business of digitising the ruins where serial killers dwell...

In 2005, veterans of Poland's vibrant video game development scene joined forces to found The Farm 51, a curiously-titled studio that soon gave the world Painkiller: Hell & Damnation. Now these People Can Fly alumni are making the most of their indie status by creating the sort of shooter that simply could not be made in the AAA world; a game that breaks free from the time-worn clichés of run-and-gun gameplay.

"Just imagine, that in real life you're exploring night location having a pistol. Okay, I guess YOU in real life are not exploring night locations with pistol, but I hope you know what I mean. So how many bullets you got available? Mainstream game answer is: 100 plus 2 hundreds for your rifle plus whatever you can grab from your enemies. But in Get Even it may be just 24, because as a secret investigator you got only 2 ammo clips hidden in your pocket. Then nothing. After shooting out everything you may try to grab your enemy weapon, which is 10 or 20 rounds again, but your enemies are not carrying ammo boxes for your weapon.

"Of course survival or stealth games have it done in a similar way, but in Get Even you never know what's gonna be next. There will be a location where you have to conquer a team of mercenaries, but there's also a mission where you have no single enemy with a gun, so after emptying your only clip you have to decide if to get in hand to hand combat or to simply escape. Not because Get Even is a typical stealth or survival game (although it is in some way), but because we simply decided to get rid of this run 'n' gun core gameplay loop there.

"It's both risky and satisfying, because many testers don't expect stuff like this at all, and at first they're scared or pissed off from the landing in somehow uncomfortable situation, but then they very quickly realise, that it makes their feeling much more empathic toward their game hero, who also should not feel comfortable in this particular moment."

Wojtek stressed to us that that the key idea of Get Even is not to simply create a run 'n' gun game, but to include shooting mechanics into a wider experience — a story of investigation, exploration, and deep emotions. Painkiller this ain't. "I got nothing against a tons of simple, explosive action, but with Get Even we wanted to not compete with other single-player shooters, but instead to take care of some ideas that are not possible within typical shooter's core gameplay loop."

First and foremost, that meant pushing the player to respect his enemies. "In most of the single-player games you're learning enemies AI behavioural patterns very quickly and the only way to make the combat challenging is to place a lot of enemies in front of you, or to make them ruthlessly accurate or tough. It's completely different in multi-player, where every enemy can be smarter or faster than you and you have to be cautious all the time. But multi-player games are mostly aimed at human vs. human competition, scoring and winning matches, so there's not too much place for storytelling or emotions other than feeling of threat and adrenaline rush.

> "Rival human players can take control of NPCs and invade single player games"

"Then our goal is to keep with variety of emotions and depth of the single-player game, but to allow for an unpredictability and adrenaline of multi-player encounters." To that end, the game will actually allow for rival human players to take control of NPCs and invade each others' single-player |story modes.

Another radical design element in Get Even is the use of digitised real-world locations. "The key idea was to not take you to exotic and epic places, but to recreate the locations that you could discover if you only took a few kilometres walk around your city. To make it closer and more touching to players, the evil and terrifying truth presented in Get Even is something what you could find just around the corner. Think about already revealed or potential murderers, rapists, bandits or freaks from your neighbourhood – that's what Get Even is all about."

Given the amount of 'ruin porn' that gets circulated on tumblr, it's a timely aesthetic; and living in a former Easter Bloc nation, he has no shortage of ruins to work with. "Obviously living in a place where we live it's much more achievable to find remainings of the Soviet empire than anything else, so of course: expect some of it."

If these novel concepts weren't enough, there's also the whole 'unreliable narrator' can of worms opened up by a story structure built around high-tech 'memory-diving.' "We got two opposite stories of two fierce foes who for some reasons are unable to solve their problems or settle the score fully in a real world. The only way to reach their true

WorldMags.net

goals is to explore each other memories and change their realities through this.

"When being murderer you put a body in your car's trunk and then burn the car in the forest, then your reality is 'My car has burnt with the body in the trunk, job done.' But if someone changed what you remember into 'My car was stolen, and I got no idea where it is' then your personality could ultimately be not a stone-cold killer, but rather a victim of a slight crime (unless your car is Bugatti, of course)."

Wojtek is excited by the potential for creepy story-telling techniques that could emerge from spelunking through human memories. Yet while his imagination can run wild in an indie setting, The Farm 51 is very much grounded in reality — for their environment scanning tech, necessity was the mother of invention.

"We wanted to play with 'what is real' question on many different levels and, therefore, we needed some very realistic visuals. Being not a huge team, we had to work out some pipeline that not only gives good quality, but also provides some uniqueness to the art direction.

"There's no other technology that can deliver so high level of detail as scanning. Technically it's possible to model unique clods of mud, scraps of paper or grains of sand, but due to timing and cost nobody will do it in a classic way. And with scanning there's no problem to have thousands or millions of unique scene elements included – it's only challenging to handle so much of data in real-time."

Wojtek confirmed that Get Even will be available on Linux and Steam Machines as well as PC, yet declined to make any predictions about where the industry is heading. "The only certain thing about the future of the gaming industry is that nothing is certain. And it's both challenge and opportunity at the same time. The market reached the point where there's no need for much more of new blockbuster titles, because there's so many of great games released every month.

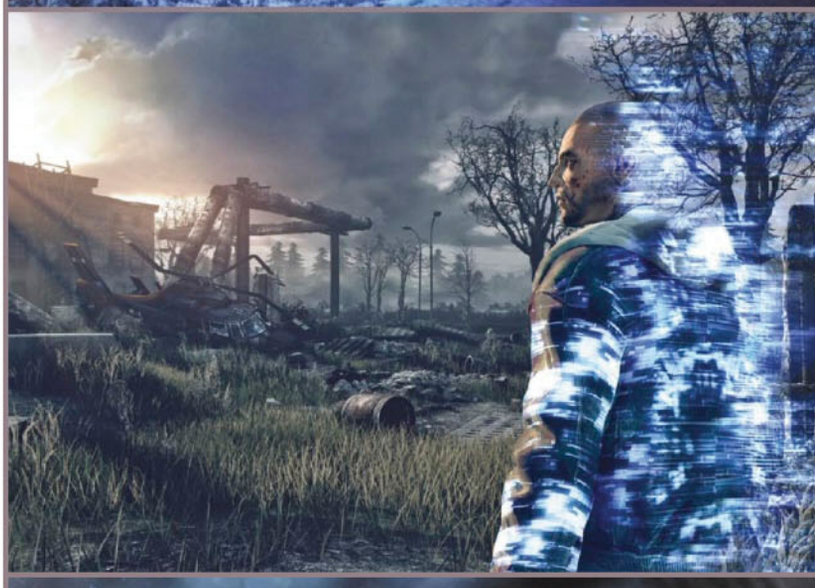
"Do you know that when I was starting my job in video game industry (15 years ago, I know, I'm a dinosaur), we usually had to wait like 4 or 6 months for a good new action title to have something to play? And I was replaying good games for 3 or 5 times not only because they were cool, but because there was not so many other titles to play in the meantime.

"And today developers and their projects are competing mostly about player time and attention, not just about their money. But easiness of releasing the game via digital distribution make it possible to scale the project for any size, from 1-person developed text adventures to giant MMO's. So there's no excuse for any developer to not make the game that has a proper scale to his team capabilities."

Above all, he recommended that aspiring indies must be pragmatic. "If you have a great talent in telling the fairy-tales and your colleague is a good drawing artist, you can create a great visual novel in team of two people, sell the game, get the fans, and reach your goal. But if you attempt to create another epic fantasy RPG having just your ideas and believing it's generally simple, then it ends where it always ended, by what I mean the unfinished projects limbo.

"So my advice is to look for some great idea (yes, today it's again time to sell games by their core fantasy, not by mainstream features), check your strengths and weaknesses, shape your project carefully toward your skills and never give up. It's the same what both aspirational indies and experienced studios should do."

Get Even is scheduled to launch on PC and next-gen consoles in 2015. *JAMES COTTEE* PC



WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

DAMN THAT'S SHINY

Sometimes your hard work just goes unnoticed

"Oh wow!" my girlfriend said, leaning over my shoulder to see some new graphical effect I added to the game I'm working on. "That looks amazing!"

"That? That's just a quick test, nowhere near finished yet! I'll show you something really cool," Moments later I showed her a section of the game, controlled by a piece of code I'm particularly proud to have written.

"Oh, that's kinda cool I guess. But go back to that other part!"

Receiving praise for work you toiled over, crafting and refining to elegance is a fantastic feeling. Nothing gives me more pride. Being praised for something you slapped together is also a nice feeling – it's still good work.

However, getting more praise for the hack job than the masterpiece is a truly strange feeling and is an experience every game programmer goes through.

My first experience with this phenomenon was with a university team project. There was no games art course at our university so our team was made up of three programmers. A space game would require less art assets, so we made a space dogfighter.

Seven months in, we had a pretty fun game. It was rough and graphically bland, but it had 32 player, lag-free online multiplayer and supported thousands of objects at once. This was our first major project and we were extremely proud of this achievement.

But when we showed people their response didn't come close to what we expected.

Oh, people enjoyed playing the game, but only our lecturer showed the excitement we had expected.

Why weren't people impressed with our tech? We were left deflated, but undeterred.

Further into development, I read an article about a glow shader. It was a simple technique and I wanted to gain experience with shaders. I spent the afternoon wrangling together an adequate implementation.

Previously, our star was just a dull sphere – with my shader it shone brilliantly. Ships became fuzzy shadows in its presence. Lasers became streaks of light.

It tweaking, but it looked good.

When we showed our peers the new effect they were amazed and engaged. They even asked questions about the implementation. After an hour discussing it, we went our separate ways. We were dumbfounded!

"Getting more praise for the hack job than the masterpiece is strange"

What was that? Why didn't they show that excitement previously?

Our game took hours of coding and optimising, but that went unnoticed compared to the glowing ball in the dark of space.

One of my team mates was humorously furious, especially as it was mostly thanks to his work that the game ran so well. He dubbed it "That Damn Glow Shader" and we referred to it if we knew a task was destined for less praise than deserved, or too much.

Eventually wanting some of the compliments, my team mate wrote a cloak shader which had ships shimmering like the Predator.

He eagerly took the game to show our classmates, expecting the adoration That Damn Glow Shader had received.

It fell flat.

It took more work than my shader, but unfortunately his graphically and technically impressive effect wasn't very obvious.

We learned that people are more excited by the shiny and obvious, regardless of the technical achievement.

Early in another project, before our artist joined, we were focusing on implementing gameplay elements and it looked atrocious.

Our artist arrived and was unimpressed. A week later it had a new coat of paint and he exclaimed, "Now, this is becoming a game!"

That Damn Shader strikes again.

Most recently, I have been working on a traffic light simulator game for mobile devices. It's a chaos management game that has players controlling traffic flow and preventing road rage. I spent weeks working on the back end of the game, getting traffic to respond to traffic lights and flowing correctly.

The most excited response to this game so far? I added a squish effect to the menu buttons, so that when clicked they wobble and the phone vibrates. Yes, seriously.

But while frustrating, I do understand these responses. Not everyone can see the beauty in a finely crafted algorithm, but everyone can appreciate shiny graphics. Not being aesthetically minded, I need to remember this, and my games will love me for it.

And hopefully next time I experience That Damn Shader it won't be as shocking. PC

JOSH BROWN *works for Signal Boost Games and has resigned himself to a life in which his excellent work will be ignore for shinys.*

WorldMags.net

CORSAIR®

Designed for Enthusiasts.
Engineered for Performance.

Corsair is ready for the new generation. Are you?

intel inside™ CORE™ i7

Corsair has the most comprehensive line of components that are optimized for the new 4th generation Intel® Core™ processor.

We have an extensive lineup of PSUs that are compatible with the new low-power sleep modes. Dominator Platinum and Vengeance Pro Series DDR3 memory modules are designed to help you push your 4th generation processor to the limit by taking advantage of the faster memory bus speeds. And, our entire line of DDR3 memory has been tested for compatibility on the new platform.

High-speed processing generates more heat, so superior cooling is a must for high-performance PCs. Hydro Series liquid CPU coolers provide hassle-free, closed-loop cooling that's more efficient and quieter than stock CPU coolers. And, all current Hydro Series models are compatible with 4th generation systems out of the box.

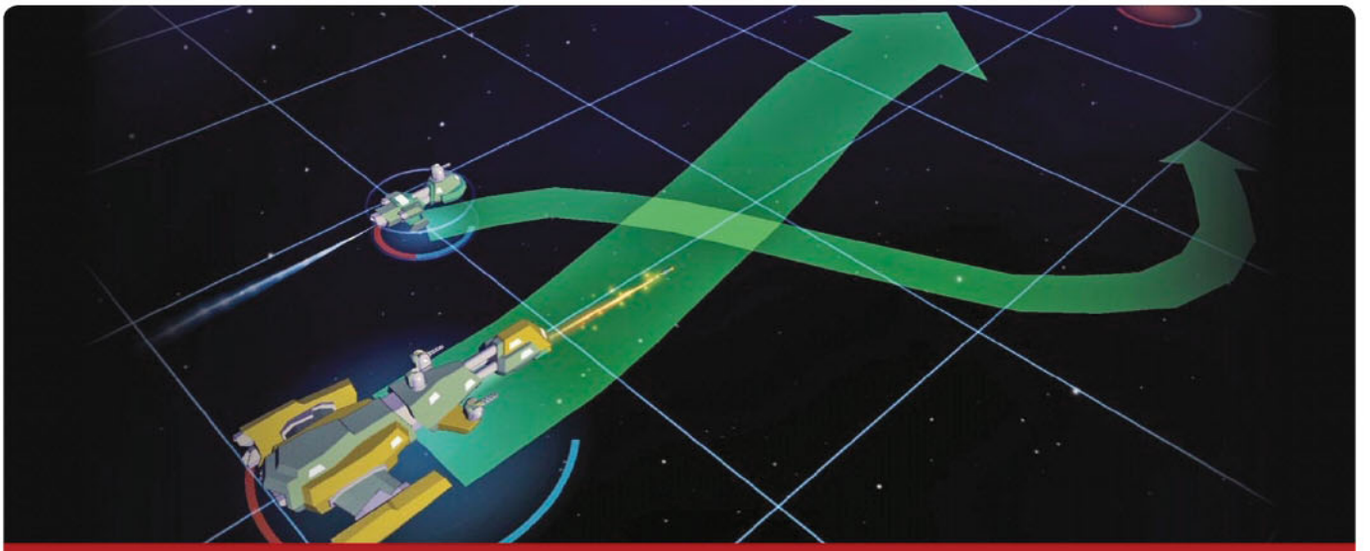
It's more than a new generation of processors – it's a new opportunity to build the best PC you've ever had. We're ready to help you make it happen.

To learn lots more, visit corsair.com/4th-generation

/corsair | @CorsairMemory

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net



INFINITY LIMITED

When the world's biggest octopus bought out Oculus, it took the world's biggest troll to put it all in perspective...

The crowd-funding craze promises to deliver us a Renaissance in space combat games. Thanks to thousands of Kickstarter punters (and some mysterious venture capital backers) David Braben is forging ahead with Elite Dangerous. Chris Roberts has accumulated a super-massive stockpile of slush for Star Citizen, and is currently assembling a strike team of procedural generation mentats to give his new universe infinite complexity. In a similar vein, Braben's wonks are harvesting all the astronomical data available to re-create the Milky Way galaxy in unfathomable detail. The universe of the new Elite won't be infinite, but it may as well be. A typical gamer couldn't explore such a cosmos in a thousand lifetimes, even if he was unemployed.

Faced with not one, but two tractless, howling voids that threaten to suck one's spare time out the proverbial airlock, it comes as something of a relief to learn that Sea of Stars is finally taking shape. The beta Steam codes were released a mere six months after the date promised in the Kickstarter (quite the timely delivery, as Kickstarter rewards go...), and with them backers can now sample the latest iteration of a design concept first explored with Strange Adventures in Infinite Space way back in 2001.

The franchise name is a tad deceptive. For while it is a roguelike at its core, offering endless permutations of a set of recognisable elements, it is structured so that a typical play session will last around 20 minutes, tops. You set out in a space sloop, explore the strange new worlds of an uncharted space sector, fight off space pirates, parley with space men, accumulate space plunder, and return before your space-deadline so that the space gangsters who funded your space mission won't cut off your space thumbs. All of the unpredictable events therein can be encapsulated in a single coffee break.

It's a concept that still holds up. For a voyage through infinite space is nothing without meaning, and it turns out that meaning can be compressed into a fairly short time-frame. As of this writing, Sea of Stars is very much a work in progress. The galactic map is clunky, the space combat interface is sketchy, and many of the placeholder pictures for laser weapons and aliens are just photos of the programmer's cats. On the other hand, it doesn't support Oculus Rift, which means there's no need to be concerned about how its new owners at Facebook will invade and ruin the entire experience.

"The Universe of the new Elite won't be infinite, but it may as well be"

Facebook is free, and always will be, because its users are not customers — they are commodities. Interchangeable units of value to the platform's real customers: advertisers (and, if you believe certain fringe websites, the CIA). It is a business model so new and so novel that there is much talk in the business pages about how it might also be unsustainable; how we could be mere astro-seconds away from a second Tech Wreck.

Either way, it is difficult to imagine how in-game advertising will enhance the Elite Dangerous experience. If one goes to the trouble and expense of strapping on a retail Oculus, ghosted and pop-up video ads are going suck all the joy out of blistering asteroid belt dog-fights, no matter how timely and targeted that advertising may be. And let's not forget that the algorithms they use to select those ads are far from perfect. If you go around smuggling arms, narcotics, and slaves, Facebook might get some peculiar ideas about about your real-world proclivities.

It's no surprise, then, that Markus 'Notch' Persson triggered his ejector seat the moment the Facebook deal went through, torpedoing any chance of Minecraft appearing on Oculus. His vast wealth means he can afford to have a conscience, and for now, that conscience recoils at the touch of Zuckerberg's tentacles. Notch's decision did not come as a surprise; in the past, he has baulked at the idea of integrating Minecraft in the Windows 8 app store, and thus being party to the dilution of Windows as an open system.

What was surprising was Cliffy B's reaction. Notorious for his outrageous haircuts, fast cars, and inveterate trolling, Clifford appeared to be quite serious when he slammed Notch's decision as a 'bratty and petty move' that 'saddened him greatly.' In the same blog post he openly admitted that as an early investor in the Oculus Rift technology, he stands to make a motza from the buyout. His words echoed the lamentations of Anakin Skywalker when he had a big sook on the lava planet at the end of Episode III: "From my point of view, Notch is evil!"

Critics (metaphorically) severed Cliffy's limbs and left him sizzling in the magma. But I applaud his outburst. Cliffy's antics have always brought levity and meaning to the PC gaming multiverse, and now that he's quit Epic, he can troll the entire planet full time.

JAMES COTTEE *spends way too much time pondering the question of whether Fortnight will be any good without Cliffy's mentorship.*

WorldMags.net

Have a need for speed?

Looking for a wireless router that delivers super-fast speed?

How does wireless speeds as fast as 1.3 gigabits per second sound? Well, hold onto your seats because Billion's new BiPAC 8800AXL wireless AC broadband router offers just that! Based on a Broadcom chipset, the BiPAC 8800AXL supports ADSL2+ and is fibre-ready, using an Ethernet Wide Area Network port to hook into the NBN as soon as it comes to your house. It also has four additional Gigabit Ethernet ports plus two USB 2.0 ports, allowing for 3G/4G modem connectivity, print serving or Network-Attached Storage.

Aside from being blazingly fast and NBN-ready, this amazing device is jam-packed with loads of other features, including:

- 4-port gigabit switch
- 1-port gigabit Ethernet WAN (EWAN)
- 2 USB ports for print server, NAS, DLNA and 3G/4G LTE USB modem
- ultimate wireless speed 300+1300Mbps
- SNR adjustments to achieve highest sync speeds
- monitoring of individual LAN/WAN traffic
- QoS for traffic prioritisation and bandwidth management

Speeds up to 1.3 gigabits per second

3 x faster than the current Wireless N protocol

BILCOM6-14

For further information on the Billion BiPAC 8800AXL or for a full list of Billion stockists Australia-wide, visit billion.com.au.

Billion Electric Co., Ltd. (Taiex: #3027), since 1973, is one of the leading providers of network equipment in the Asia Pacific region.
For more information, please visit billion.com.au. Billion is exclusively distributed by PC Range Pty Ltd. pcrange.com.au

BILLION

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

YE SHALL FIND

Though, in Card Hunter, possibly not what you originally sought.

The most precious of memories are forged between friends in mutual struggle against monsters, men and murderous forests. This is Card Hunter's hook. Like many, I was initially intrigued by the abundance of loot (to collect and micromanage) in this tabletop-style game from Blue Manchu, but this was not what ultimately saw me to the very end of the current content. No backpack, no matter how full, could have inspired me to replay Duke Oggencot's map that many times.

Allow me to get momentarily mathematical. So it takes 15 gold pieces (won both in game and purchased through microtransactions) to revive your party for another three attempts. I spent 350 (exactly) reviving my party on the one map of one campaign. 350 divided by 15 is 23, and one third. Multiply by 3 and you get (oh, seriously, oh no) 70 attempts. (Plus the initial 3 free attempts for 73 altogether.) I think I spent two whole weeks replaying it.

Yes, it was a difficult map and it would be impossible to work out how many permutations of gear I had by this point. In many ways, Duke Oggencot taught me as much as the rest of the game, as I switched weapons, armour and accessories around. Card Hunter really is a "game" game, too, with the numbers, and the positioning, and the chance element, and the class/race strictures. I do love that, but even more compellingly, as the story progressed, I became absolutely determined not to let my friends down.

There's Gary, who has recently discovered Card Hunter and (loosely) acts as game master. His eager approach is highly infectious. (And his mum, who you only ever see the apron, dress and high heels of, periodically interjects mildly embarrassing comments.) Then, Karen is the pizza girl who becomes part of the plot, at least partly because Card Hunter sessions are fuelled by endless food and soft drink. The story, and development of these characters, is both lighthearted and tongue in cheek.

And Melvin, the supercilious older brother, alternates between playing with you, ignoring you and overtly sabotaging your games. One of his best characters is Melvelous the Magnificent, who poses atop a pile of treasure with two women draped around his legs. (He has a crotch that would make Jareth, from Labyrinth, blush.) Melvelous' gear, cards and risky build show that he is appropriately powerful, yet very vulnerable, in a way that neatly parodies his creator.

At some point, I joked on Twitter that I should cosplay one of Melvelous' swimming costume babes, and Card Hunter designer and writer Joe McDonagh replied, "I have a dream of holding a real world Cardstock III at PAX next year, complete with an actor playing a real life Melvin." Actor? Right! Probably the cleverest thing about Card Hunter is how easy it is to forget that none of this actually happened. The game somehow made me nostalgic for a time that didn't exist, you know, in real life.

"Melvelous has a crotch that would make Jareth, from Labyrinth, blush"

For you, perhaps a version of it did (or still does.) I was a pizza girl, like Karen, for a couple of years in my early twenties, but I never really had people to play tabletop with. In retrospect, perhaps there were a couple of Garys and Melvins in the mix of people I was friends with, I just never noticed (beyond the occasional all-night game of Risk.) As to Card Hunter's protagonist, though, characters in the game talked to "me" but I never got a clear sense of who "I" was.

I think, in a similar way as to in Heroine's Quest, which I outlined last month, Card Hunter assumes the player is male. It's more of a feeling than something I can prove except to say that, while Gary was awkwardly, but sweetly, pining after (apparently) the only girl he's ever met; Karen, I was sitting right there. Hello? Gary? As far as Gary was concerned, I was either a guy, overtly not interested in guys or invisible. (Or, I suppose, significantly less attractive than Karen. What's so great about her anyway?)

Well, I mean, perhaps the protagonist could be a girl. The experience was quite reminiscent of being friends with the computer savvy boys at High School and how they were completely oblivious to the fact that I was both female and entirely romanceable. (Seriously, it's fine. It was really Melvin who I wanted to like me, anyway, not Gary. Melvin who so witheringly called my combat skills, "agricultural." But yes, I know I'm beautiful in my own special way and I'm totally not going to cry.)

Where was I? Oh, yeah. Card Hunter. Loved it. In a game where you routinely place your fighter in tremendously varied and horrifying danger in order to cause only somewhere between 4 and 6 damage to one of a horde's minions, that moment you realise you have a rare, 17 damage bludgeon along with All Out Attack (for double damage) and a +2 priest buff up your sleeve, is absolutely exquisite. When I'm an old lady, I'll likely tell my grandkids how Gary high-fived my good luck and that the pizza was delicious. PC

MEGHANN O'NEILL *pizza delivery uniform consisted of imp-proof robes, shifty skin hat and possessed shoes.*

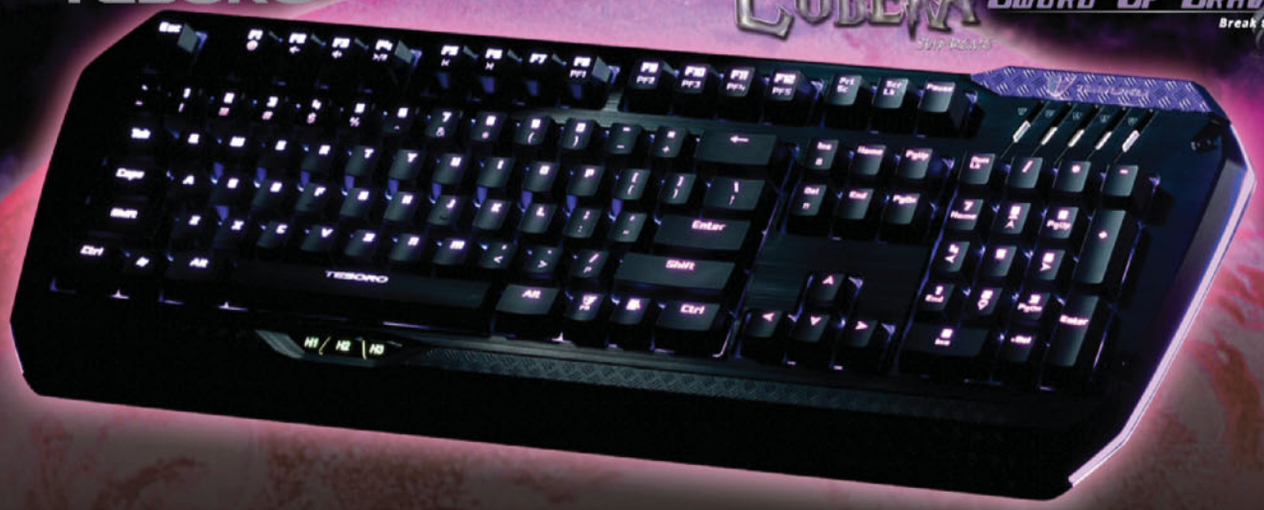
WorldMags.net

TESORO®

LOBERA™ SUPREME

THE SWORD OF BRAVERY

Break the Rules



WITH RGB LEDs

Full color led illumination mechanical keyboard

- Gaming grade mechanical switch
- Switchable USB 6-N key and full-N key rollover
- 5 instant profiles
- 6 levels LED backlight (2 gaming area modes)
- Full color illumination side bar effect

Macro setting

- One touch game / PC mode switch
- 5 profiles, 300 macro keys, 2000 key processes per profile available
- SYNC keyboard function
- One touch record button for macro live
- 512KB build in memory

Full function extension ports

- 2 high speed USB 2.0 ports
- Audio headphone and microphone jacks
- DC-in jack (5V 2.5A) for additional power supply

More

- Embedded multimedia keys
- Gold plated USB connector
- Anti-slip rubberized tilt feet
- Compatible with WIN XP / Vista / 7 / 8
- Braided cable

AVAILABLE AT:

Umart® online

mwave.com.au Australia's Largest Online Tech Retailer

PLE Computers

scorptec computers

MECHKB

Dcomp YOUR TECHNOLOGY SUPPLIER

capitolcomputer

RESELLER INQUIRIES: http://www.ictcentury.com.au/
Tesoro@ictcentury.com.au

2013 ICT Century (Australia) Pty Ltd, all rights reserved.
"Tesoro" and the Tesoro logo remain the property of Tesoro Technologies.

Break the Rules

www.tesorotec.com

WorldMags.net

10 TO WATCH

HOTLINE MIAMI 2: WRONG NUMBER

DEVELOPER DENNATON GAMES
PUBLISHER DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DUE Q3 2014
www.devolverdigital.com/games/view/hotline-miami-2-wrong-number

The ultra violent Hotline Miami's next of kin is set for late 2014 and it looks like more of the same… which isn't a bad thing. From what we played, a disfigured tiger mask disables the use of weapons but allows your fists to explode enemies in a Kenshiro-esque punch. Story wise, the events of the first game have been sensationalized in a very Natural Born Killers manner, and you're currently dwelling in the aftermath.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION: BEYOND EARTH

DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
DUE SPRING 2014
www.civilization.com

Sid Meier has left the constraints of planet earth behind, shooting to the stars with the spiritual sequel to 1999s Alpha Centauri. Not literally, but nevertheless, Civ's space installment is on its way. But why space, you ask? Apparently Earth has become overpopulated and overburderned by its inhabitants, so humankind has set its sights elsewhere. We have been lucky to be among the first to see it in action, with more on page 32.

UNBENDED

DEVELOPER SPARKLINGBIT
PUBLISHER SPARKLINGBIT
DUE TBA
www.unbended.de

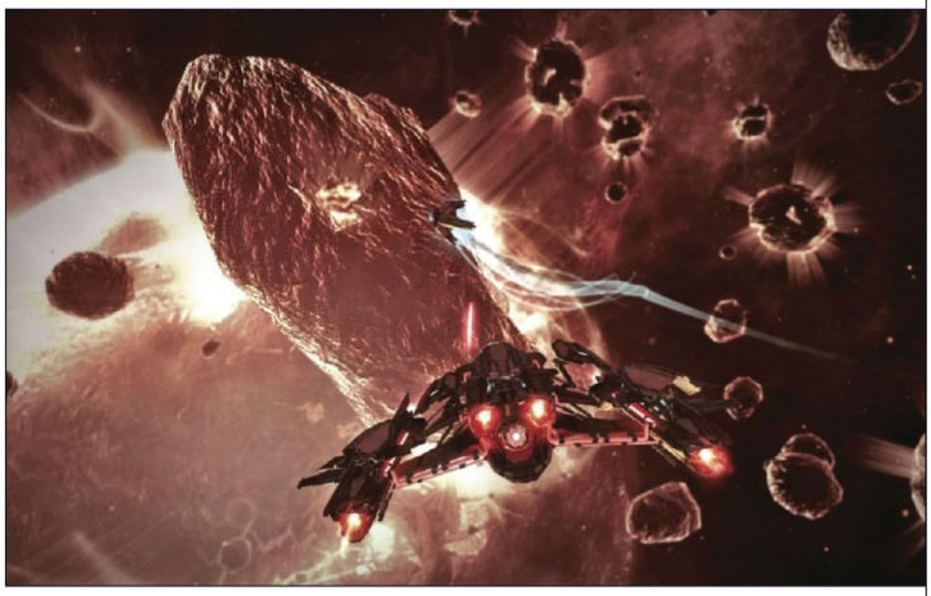
Veteran devs from Sacred went rogue and announced UNSACRED, now called UNBENDED… for obvious reasons. At this stage, the game is set to be an action RPG that focuses on being the best damn ARPG it can be, featuring "well-founded character-based skill systems". UNBENDED will force players to develop until they wield skills "powerful enough to shake entire continents". Little is known about classes and characters at this point, but it's definitely one to keep an eye on.

WorldMags.net

SPACE NOIR

DEVELOPER N-FUSION INTERACTIVE
PUBLISHER UNITY GAMES
DUE 2014
www.unitygames.com/games/space-noir

N-Fusion, the devs behind Deus Ex: The Fall and Air Mail, announced their new title via gameplay trailer that exhibits a whole lot of space and not so much noir. The game features Lylat Wars space combat complete with barrel rolls, captioned dialogue and 180s. The ship we pilot will be completely upgradable, with a range of mods that span thrusters, hull design, paint, weapons, utilities (cloak, radar thermal censoring etc). Main character Hal Markham, seems pretty transparent, spouting lame dialogue, usually regarding whiskey or being pissed off.



FORTNITE

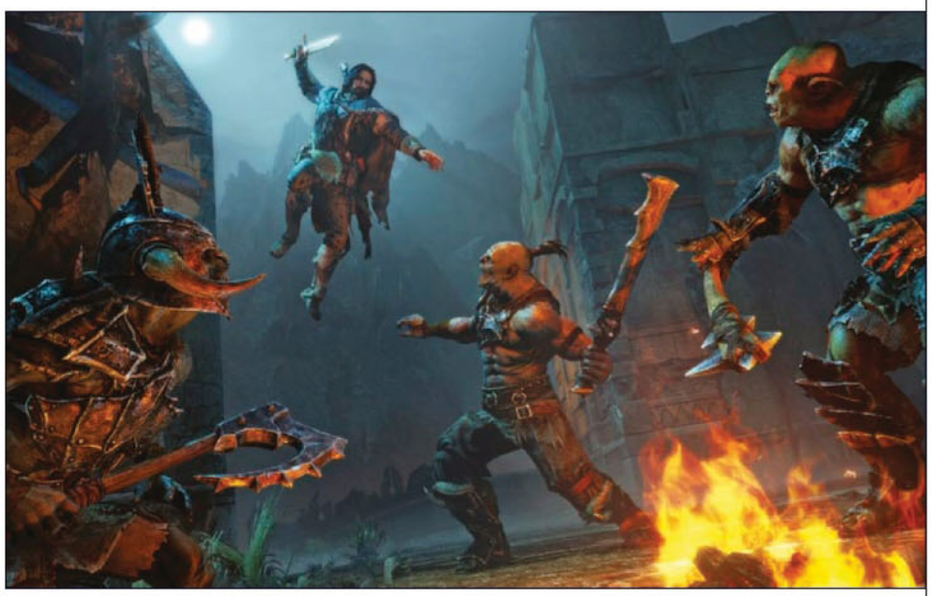
DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES
PUBLISHER EPIC GAMES
DUE TBA
www.fortnite.com

Looking to prove that they can make games outside of the Gears of War series, Epic has taken to the streets with Fortnite, a fort building RPG action game that pits you against hordes of demons in a domestic environment. It promises genuinely fun base building, in which you can build huge forts out of wood, scrap metal, rocks etc as you fend off the hordes and hordes of baddies. So far classes include the Constructor, the Ninja, the Commando, and the Scavenger, the resource gatherer.

MIDDLE EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

DEVELOPER MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
DUE OCTOBER 7, 2014
www.shadowofmordor.com

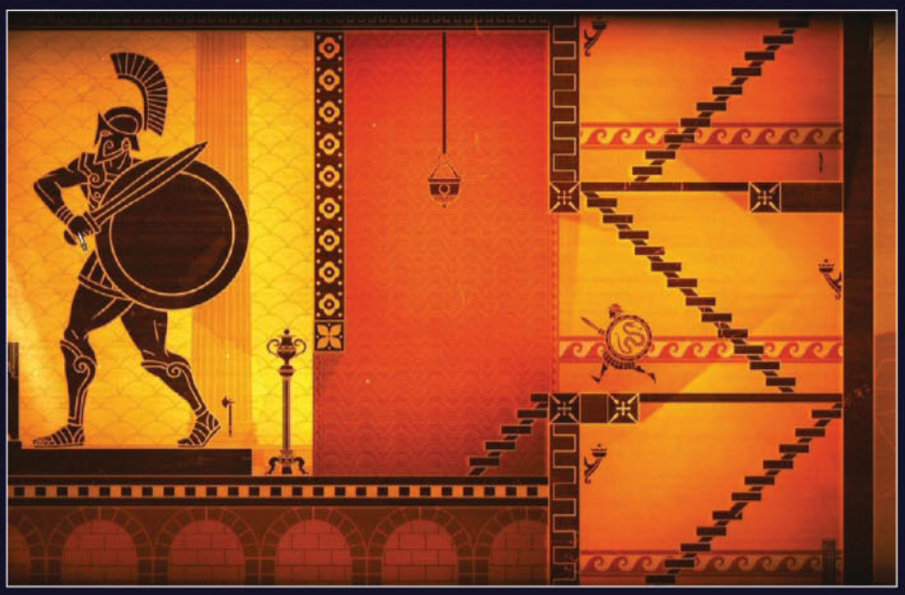
Shadow of Mordor looks like a blend between Tolkein lore, Assassin's Creed and the Arkham series. The only problem is, wraiths have always been associated with evil in Tolkein's world, usually resulting from a curse or punishment for misdeeds in life. From all accounts, Talion seems like a good loyal ranger, granted Wraith powers to allow him vengeance, kind of like a less goth version of The Crow. We know little of the true story behind Talion, but we're interested to see how this plays out.



WorldMags.net

APOTHEON

DEVELOPER Alientrap
PUBLISHER Alientrap
DUE 2014
www.apotheongame.com



With an art style ripped from Greek pottery, Alientrap has been teasing Apotheon for some time now. Boasting a huge single player campaign, Apotheon wears the mask of a highly stylized Metroidvania. The latest trailer shows an abundance of different warriors going to battle wielding spears, swords, shields, daggers, bows, slings and, even giant boulders. Enemies come just as varied, pitting players against hulking giants, wild beasts, armoured warriors and other beautifully designed Grecian foes. We're literally frothing at the mouth for this title.

GODS WILL BE WATCHING

DEVELOPER Devolver Digital
PUBLISHER Deconstructeam
DUE Winter 2014
www.godswillbewatching.com

Beginning as a short survival mini game, Gods Will Be Watching has expanded to become a sci-fi survival adventure of epic proportions. Players are tasked with laying down the hard and final word on who eats, sleeps, fights, hunts, lives and dies as they take control of space veteran Sgt Burden. A minimalistic 'point and click thriller', new footage shows the crew dealing with all sorts of tough situations, most notably a Cpn Kirk inspired interrogation sequence involving a bound and shirtless Sgt Burden being beaten to a pulp in a chair.

H1Z1

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment
DUE Q3 2014
www.reddit.com/r/h1z1

To join the ranks of the "like DayZ but…" club, Sony Online Entertainment have been working on their very own Free to Play Zombie survival MMO, H1Z1. The game features no skills or leveling, merely placing the focus on crafting and surviving. Day and night cycles are crucial to the game, and fire is currently a pillar, allowing players to set anything ablaze. But Sony aren't half arseing this one, as a very active reddit has created a strong dialogue between the devs and its audience, constantly abuzz with gameplay elements, suggestions, what works, and what doesn't work.

WorldMags.net

BORDERLANDS: THE PRE-SEQUEL

DEVELOPER 2K AUSTRALIA, GEARBOX SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
DUE SPRING 2014
borderlandsthegame.com/index.php/game/borderlands-the-presequel

Borderlands' sequel has a prequel, and it's set in space. Being handled by 2Ks Aussie devs, the latest Borderlands iteration follows Handsome Jack's rise to the position of Hyperion CEO that he occupies as rthe big bad of Borderlands 2.

Players will take control of some of Borderlands more memorable NPCs and bosses, namely Wilhelm the Enforcer, Athena the Gladiator, Nisha the Lawbringer and finally a playable Claptrap, the …err Fragtrap. The moon base environment leads to some innovative low g gameplay, including higher jumps, oxygen jetpacks and enemies that ragdoll into space. Plus it begins to write the shameful wrong of Gearbox never actually taking players to the moonbase in the Borderlands 2 DLC (despite clearly teasing it many times during the game)

The pre-sequel is much more than mere DLC, as it's rumoured to be bigger than the first game, but not as big as the second. Whatever the size, we look forward to spending some more time getting to know the man behind that beautiful, terrifying, handsome mask.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

THE END OF CIVILIZATION

Firaxis is hard at work on a spiritual successor to the beloved Alpha Centauri, and only the second game to take the Civilization franchise away from our planet. But this is no mere cosmetic change, as **JOHN GILLOOLY** delves into the new systems and concepts in Beyond Earth.

Firaxis call it the great mistake, an unspecified event that happened on Earth and sent its citizens to the stars. It is a way to acknowledge that Beyond Earth follows on from the events of Civilization, but also gently plays on the nature of victory in the 4X strategy series.

Each game of Civilization is a journey, using the same parts each time to reach wildly different outcomes. Victory is never quite as important as what happens along the way, this time you might nuke the French, next time India might outgrow you and engulf your tiny state, or Egypt might manage to pull out each Wonder first, choking off all important parts of your strategy. If anything, the game ending causes this journey to cease, as you watch the fruits of your Civilization disappear off into space, wondering where they are headed.

Beyond Earth marks the second time Firaxis has looked at that happens next for Civilization. The first was the game that the studio was founded to make, Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri (SMAC), a game that still stands as the highpoint for the genre, and Beyond Earth is very much a spiritual successor to that.

"Beyond Earth picks up after the spaceship takes off" begins senior producer Dennis Shirk "There is this notion of a great mistake that occurred, that caused people to have to leave Earth, to seek out a new home, and the game picks up where that starts. Its about you setting up for your journey, you picking your faction and landing on this strange alien planet, you are alone, there is nobody else with you at this time, and all you can see looking out massive crevices of geothermal steam coming out. You're eventually going to be running into aliens that are somewhat sentient and have an opinion on you so they

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

might be hostile, they might not be hostile. But basically you have to find a way for your people to survive on this new place."

The whole game is all about exploration, eventually other human factions are going to start landing on the planet, introducing themselves. "The whole approach is to give you an entirely new experience to play that is unlike anything you have seen in something like Civ 5 or Civ 4"

As Lead Designer Dave McDonough puts it "It's about the future of mankind", and asking "who do they become over the next 3, 4 or 5000 years."

A STEP BEYOND ALPHA CENTAURI

When asked about the legacy of SMAC, the last time Firaxis wondered what happened next, Dennis was quite positive "I don't think we have to worry about direct comparison, because this is a game that stands on its own two legs and I think we have actually surpassed Alpha Centauri in many ways by opening it up and making it accessible to our entire Civ audience.

This is a game that will appeal to the vast numbers of players who lost hours to SMAC, while not being shackled by its legacy. The feeling that this game is consider to be a new concept in its own right is readily apparent when you talk to the team at Firaxis, who are clearly excited by the setting.

tiles beneath them. You can launch, for example, a military satellite over a battlefield and it can shoot down lasers to attack your enemies on the battlefield. or you can have more peaceful satellites that boost your tile output around your cities. That system doesn't make sense in an historical setting, but with the freedom of sci fi we were really able to come up with cool new things like that."

One of the other significant additions is a quest system, which rewards and encourages you to explore and engage with the planet. It isn't a single narrative, but rather a series of challenges placed in front of you as your colony settles in.

"The quest system is a big addition" according the Civilization Producer, Lena Brenk, "We wanted to give the player a new framework for this planet. For the future they are going to get to know the planet and its history, so the quest system is one of the examples of how we deliver story and give players goals to achieve during the playthrough."

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

As you watch a game of the currently pre Alpha version of Beyond Earth play out, the Civilization V roots are quite obvious. Your civilization lands on a planet, with a colonist unit and one or two others. You find a spot to locate your base, then task your combat units and explorers with venturing out into the fog of war to see what can be located. The environment clearly isn't Earth like in any way, but for the first turn or two it feels like a Civilization game.

"The whole approach is to give you an entirely new experience to play"

According to Lead Designer Anton Strenger moving from work on the Civilization Expansions to Beyond Earth was refreshing. "One of the really great strengths of Beyond Earth is being freed from that historical constraint". This was especially important from a design perspective, where the team relished, and were a little daunted by, the need to invent new things rather than find great historical examples to reference.

This freeing from history isn't just apparent in the look of Beyond Earth. It also manifests itself in the systems underlying the game, which have roots in Civilization V but have been reimagined. One such system, that Anton had been working on before we talked, was the orbital layer.

"The orbital layer - where you launch satellites over the game map and they effect what is going on on the

Then your units come across their first Aliens. These look like Barbarian units, and are spawned by nest tiles akin to encampments, but present a much more complex challenge to the player. When you land on the planet in Beyond Earth you are the first arrival, and other civilizations will land later in the game. Your initial challenge is to gain a toehold on the planet, and this involves dealing with the local populace.

"The aliens for us represent this wild, unknown hostility of

WorldMags.net

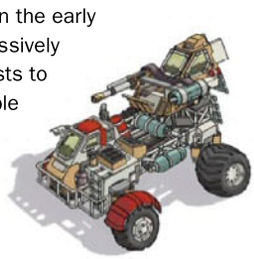
WorldMags.net

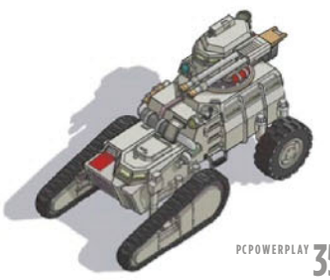
this alien planet and you bring a lot of tech with you on the ship but you dont know how it applies to this new environment." says Anton "They're not always going to be hostile, you can have a peaceful existence with them". But you can also "come out with guns blazing... you might get a lot of early gains from that. But they are going to be pushing back as a result."

Firaxis make much of carefully dealing with the Aliens, suggesting the there are varying degrees of sentience and that these species will have long memories, and that the mechanic fills the role of diplomacy in the early stages of the game. Aggressively carve your way through nests to build a home for your people and you will have to deal with the consequences, keep a respectful distance and things might not play out that way.

Other Aliens will pose a more passive set of threats. One of which that was explained to us was a kind of Alien Worm, that makes its way peacefully across the map. It only really presents a threat when it closes in on your settlements, churning through your improvements. This then begs the question of whether you throw resources into de-worming the environment, or suck it up and rebuild.

After all, as Lena puts it "you have landed on this planet and you don't belong, the Aliens belong".





WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

As you can expect, there are many ways to deal with your new world, and these are baked deeply into the DNA of the game. It begins at the beginning, as civilisation comes to an end and your people head for the stars.

Unlike Civ V, where you picked a faction that determined all your starting bonuses, this is called a Loadout process in Beyond Earth. You pick your Faction, then spaceship type and cargo. These give you bonuses of various types. For example, the cargo can include a Marine unit, which will be much more capable than your standard soldiers and give you an edge clearing out aliens.

There are also three possible worlds upon which you can land, each with its own environment and challenges. On the world in our demo, which was a fungal planet, the explorer and soldier units found themselves dealing with a mist called miasma, which did damage to any unit that ended its turn within. There was promise that certainly technological developments would allow Miasma to be leveraged for the good of your civilisation. We also saw an outcropping of the cutely named Firaxite, a metal whose use your civ can research down the track.

One of the more interesting encounters we witnessed was between several units and an alien known as a Siege Worm, which flailed about and needed a show of force to take down. Once it died it left a corpse that could be investigated by explorers, inside the promise of everything from technology to tame alien units that can be used by your civ. Other things were just glimpsed during our brief demo time, but we were intrigued by the repulsor field city improvement, which promised to keep aliens two squares away from your colony, or the need to build trade routes to enable new colonies to grow. There are clearly many more surprises to be had in Beyond Earth.

> "There is no linear tech tree, because you are in the future now"

THE TECH WEB

It isn't just a visual overhaul being done for Beyond Earth. Those systems that govern bonuses as you progress through the game have also been reimagined. Most significant of these is the Tech Web, an evolution of the standard tech tree used in Civ. It is designed as a nod to the fact that Beyond Earth deals with possibilities, whereas Civ dealt in reality, where we know the linear progression of science quite well.

"There is no linear tech tree anymore, because you are really in the future now and in uncharted

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

territory. So when you start out you are in the middle of the technology web, rather than on a linear technology tree" According to Dennis. "It will change the very look of what your civ looks like"

You start the game in the centre of the web, and as you research you move outwards. This not only keeps every game different, thanks to the design nudging you to push your technological developments in a certain direction. To make the most of your research you will want to focus on an area of the tech web, pushing yourself down a path that manifests in the look and feel of your civilization and its inhabitants.

We only got a brief glimpse at the tech web but it looks fantastic, with an intricacy to the technological relationships that made us hanker for more. It is quite clear why Firaxis is so excited about this new feature, it takes one of the enduring parts of Civ and makes it new, reinvents it to suit the circumstance, which is indicative of why this is a standalone title, not just an expansion pack.

It also gives the chance for designers to stretch their brains, as Dave tells us, "We are very enthusiastic about contemporary spaceflight and realistic opportunities for humanity in space, but also fans of Sci-Fi".

This means that "when the game begins all the options you have are based on conventional contemporary scientific discovery" however "When you land on the planet you'll find a lot that you'll recognise about establishing habitation, surviving and exploring the new world but as you branch out into the outer rings of the tech web it does become more mysterious, strange, interesting and more Sci-Fi"

AFFINITY AND ITS EFFECTS

Sci-Fi also influences another new system called affinities. Going by the names Supremecy, Purity and Harmony, these kinds of tech take your civilization in very different directions depending on how you decide to tackle the Alien World. "Its somewhere in between philosophy, ideology and religion. Its sort of an identify for humanity that your civilisation decides for itself along the way."

Supremacy is technology focused, with an emphasis on computers, robotics, using machines to control the hostile world.

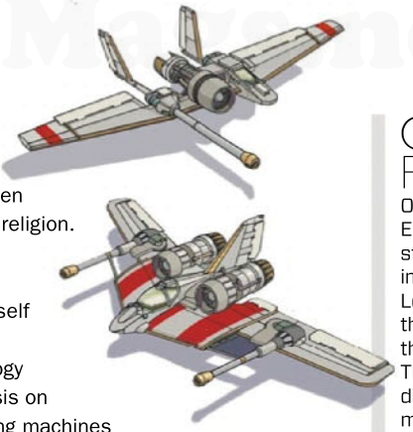
Harmony is the opposite, adapting themselves to become more at one with the planet. It involves a lot of biology, ecology, terraforming and other environmental sciences.

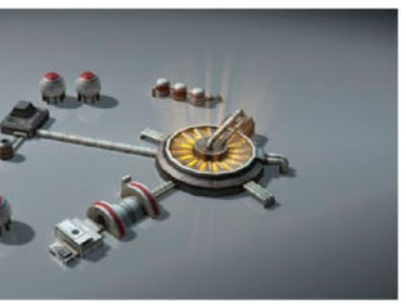
Purity involves the clinging onto the idea of what humanity once was, of changing their new home to fit them, and to keep themselves pure.

While choices made on the tech web will have a dominant effect on how your civilization evolves, it isn't the only new system at play here. During our demo we saw that the virtue screen (Virtues are analogous to policies in Civ V) gave rewards for spreading your points out across the table horizontally, with the vertical depth a lot greater than in Civ V.

This has been done to encourage those who wish to generalise, the game no longer punishing players for not obsessively filling out every last point in a tree. It provides bonuses no matter which way you want to develop, and allows for deeper choice than in Civ V.

We asked about Multiplayer, but were informed that while planned, it is too early to talk any details. But from the massive slice of single player that we were exposed to, we can safely say that Beyond Earth is right near the top of PC PowerPlay's most anticipated titles of 2014. PC





CATERING FOR THE MASSES

One of the big focuses with Beyond Earth is catering for the myriad play styles out there, something that is important to the team at Firaxis. As Lena puts it "One of the strengths of the Civilization series as a whole is that there is not one mold of player. There is a lot of diversity, a lot of different types of players and that mirrors in the studio. We don't just have the warmongers or just the culture players, we have a whole variety of very different play styles on the team so we get into very heated discussions sometimes"

According to Anton, diversity is "something that we keep in mind with every system that we add. Which kind of play style or type of player is going to enjoy working with this and which players might focus on something else instead. We try to have enough variety in a lot of different systems that can cater to the widest cross section of playstyles"

Which begs the question of whether trying to keep so many happy is restrictive, which thankfully it doesn't appear to be. As Anton puts it "Its hard to say. I would say it does tend to give us more freedom. something thats very valuable about the many different play styles that exist is that it forces us to think about the game in very different ways to what we are used to. We have a 3 man Design team and a bunch of different people on the Art team and the Production side of things as well and we are thinking about the games in different ways. Through playtesting internally and talking about the design systems that we have with each other I think having different play styles represented opens many doors for us and lets us think about things in new ways that we might not have thought about before. I dont think I've ever felt constrained by it."

Lena explained how baked into design it is " The way Civ games are built are like layers of different systems, and every system in itself isn't very complicated. There are very clear choices and decisions that you have to make in any one system or layer. The complexity comes from the interaction between those layers and those systems." Firaxis is all about "Giving the systems to the player and letting them run with it."

WorldMags.net

TANKS A

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

AS SPORT

Wargaming takes eSports to the next, heavily armoured level, at the first Wargaming.net League Grand Final in Warsaw. David Hollingworth was there.

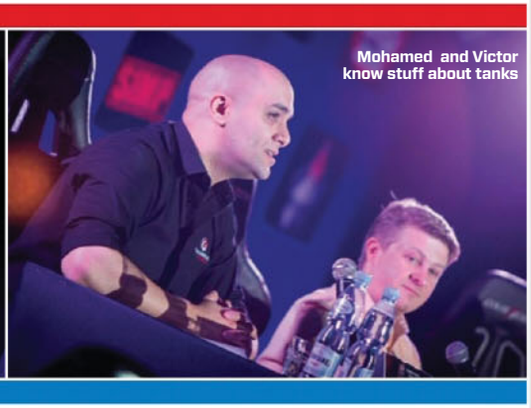
PHOTOS BY HELENA KRISTIANSSON

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

It's bit of a cliche to say that a company comes from humble beginnings, but in Wargaming's case, it really is true. Formed in 1998 by CEO Victor Kisklyi - who's still in charge - Wargaming's first title was a digital version of popular tabletop wargaming ruleset De Bellis Antiquitatus. DBA Online wasn't big, but some of us do remember it reasonably fondly, as we also remember Wargaming's next release, turn-based SF title Massive Assault. They were solid games, but nothing that was ever going to set the world on fire; Wargaming basically wore its rather hardcore strategy-sim heart on its sleeve.

Then, along came a little game called World of Tanks. Almost overnight Wargaming went from a hyper-niche company with a small but dedicated team of Russian developers, to a global games machine with one of the most profitable - and popular - free to play games on the market.



Mohamed and Victor know stuff about tanks

It has also become a surprisingly powerful player in the eSports field, and we recently saw just how dedicated the company is when we were invited to attend the Wargaming.net League grand finals in Warsaw.

It was a bit big…

BY THE NUMBERS

It takes a lot of money and balls to for a Russian company that makes a game about tanks to claim that it's 'invading Warsaw', but but Wargaming has both of those in spades. And since Poland is one of the biggest World of Tanks communities, it's a pretty natural fit.

Still, getting over 200 staff, developers, and press - not counting the 14 seven-player teams - from all over the world to one city in Eastern Europe, and then hosting them for a three-day tournament, is a challenge.

But it's a challenge Wargaming's facing head on.

"A lot of players came to us wanting esports," reveals Wargaming's eSports Director for Europe and North America, Mohamed Fadl, at the event. The game was obviously designed around competitive play, but no one had been thinking of taking it to the next level of the pro-gaming circuit, he admits. "So we organised regional tournaments, with no prize money, and it was fine. But the demand kept rising.

"In 2011 we didn't have a dedicated eSports department," he admits. "Then in 2012, we had our first international tournament, with USD$100,000 in prize money. And that's when we created the eSports department, which seemed crazy, but we thought itmade sense. And that year we had 30,000 participants in over 120 events.

"So in 2013, we invested $8 million into esports," which even Mohamed admits is a crazy amount of money. "How do you know it's going to be a success, with that much money? But that was a good investment; it gave us the global Wargaming.net League."

So what does millions of dollars get you in eSports? Well, a very close relationship with your host city, for one thing. Warsaw's Deputy Mayor helped open the event, and even admitted that he is a player - albeit not a very good one. It gets you something like 40,000 teams, and about two million players, all competing for a lot of prize money, not to mention bragging rights and the chance to be the first team to get their names etched onto the Wargaming.net League trophy. But it doesn't stop there.

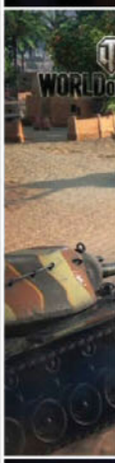
PUTTING THE SPORTS IN ESPORTS

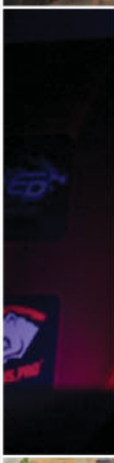
Sure, the stars of eSports may not be hulking physical specimens, but the world of eSports has more in common with so-called 'real' sports than you might think. Nowhere is this more obvious than the way the pre-match preamble shakes out. Just like watching commenters break down each team and their stars and tactics on, say, a Rugby League broadcast, eSports commentators are just as glib and well informed, breaking down the personalities, stats, and play styles of each team.

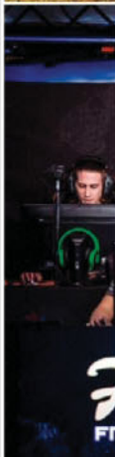
In World of Tanks, one of the big talking points during the event was about how to run a battle, especially in terms of how shot-callers work. These are the team leaders, and there seems to be a range of tactics in this regard. Some teams have a single caller, whereas others prefer multiple callers to be able to respond to a wide variety of battlefield outcomes. The general thought is a single caller is the best way to run a fight, but there is a certain degree of flexibility in having one or two extra guys taking the lead, especially when a team is completely in sync when it comes to teamwork. Lemming Train, the local Polish favourites, even went so far as to have every team member calling shots for each other - that's trust.

A lot also depends on the coin toss that starts each match. The winner gets to decide whether it picks the first map, or the side of the map to start on (a lot of teams actually prefer the latter option).

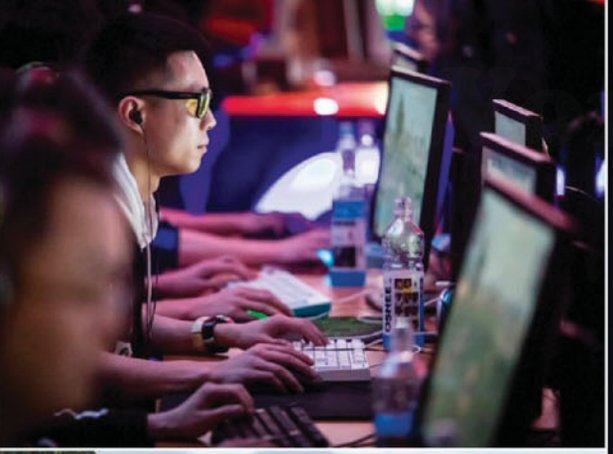
There's a tonne of strategy to each game even before the first shot is fired.







WorldMags.net



"It takes a lot of money and balls for a Russian company to claim it is invading Warsaw"

WorldMags.net

NAVI win the overall crown of World's finest Tankers

Victor Kisklyi hasn't stopped looking ahead.

"This is all great news for us, for our players, and great news for the eSports world," he said at the event. "It lifts and raises interest for our game amongst millions and millions of young people, who join the game after watching Youtube broadcasts. Wargaming is just about the only global company doing something on this scale, so we're putting more and more resources into the game, adding in Twitch support, making it suitable for broadcasting. We're working on more sponsorship and improving our logistics."

This year is going to be even bigger. Wargaming's investing USD$10 million in 2014, all to grow the eSports side of the game. In fact, getting World of Tanks eSports-ready is no mean feat.

FOR THE PLAYERS, BY THE PLAYERS

Out of the box - or, out of the cloud, perhaps more accurately - World of Tanks needs some work for truly balanced, pro play. As it stands at the moment, even now the game uses player-derived mods at high level play, so that it can be enjoyed by spectators, and Wargaming's altered the game so it plays with seven tanks aside instead of the usual 15.

In the future, though, Wargaming's planning to work even closer with its community of players.

"We want to grow the grass roots level of the game," Mohamed tells us, "to promote it with people who just want to get better, play more, and rise up to the next level, and maybe play in events like this."

"We're also starting the Wargaming Partnership Program - we have players who develop mods, who do things with the game that we just can't do.... one thing we've learnt is that the community is better than we are. So this program will let us help provide players with the tools to create new parts of the game."

The pro community, the kind of players who can make it all the way to the top of events like this, are not being forgotten either. "These guys are hardcore, and they know what they want and expect," says Mohamed. Which is why, along with a tonne of PR types, techies, and other staff, Wargaming also has a few devs at the grand finals, so that they can not only watch the pros, but talk to them and learn from them. Some players will even be getting contract offers to go back to HQ and play more, with the devs watching, and learning still more about the game, and how it works at this level of gameplay."

> "Wargaming is investing US$10 Million to grow the eSports side of the game"

"We want to create a more dedicated version of the game for eSports matches," Victor adds, "so that it's more challenging for the players, and more spectacular to watch, with new maps, new modes... We're thinking of the game for both players, and for those watching. But we still have to keep the game balanced and fair."

And for the future? Can the game get any bigger?

"You know," says Victor, "we like to share. We share what we do well with the industry. Together with Riot Games we were one of the first to push free to play; I gave thousands of lectures to explain how it works. This is the new paradigm, but one game does not make for a big olympic-style event - so we need to work with everyone on this.

"It's not happening tomorrow, but I think the time will come very soon." PC

WorldMags.net

ANATOMY OF A MATCH

The day's first event is between long-time rivals Synergy and Lemming Train. The team captains start out by vetoing certain maps from the rotation, each vying to find the right map for their chosen tactics and play styles.

As it turns out, the first map up is Ensk, a tense, close map, with a single open flank - the 'green side'. The rest of the map is made up of lots of close fire lanes; there are many different ways to play.

When the match starts, Synergy refuses a flank, simply planting some fast Tier One T1 Cunninghams in cover and stacking their heavier armour on the left, among the buildings. Lemming spreads out, though, carefully using its own scouting T1s to find and kill one of Synergy's own scouts.

Then the match slows down, as Lemming tries to draw out Synergy into some pretty nasty fire lanes, but Synergy just do not take the bait. Synergy instead shifts to the left flank en masse, leaving one tank covering their cap; they stick together, making sure that they can concentrate fire on any tank they spot, but Lemming isn't moving out of position.

Synergy shifts again, playing fluidly across the entire map - they move back to the center, and push tentatively forward. They're refusing to fall into any traps, instead pushing, moving their point of attack to force Lemming to react to them, and hopefully make a mistake.

And then it all goes off. Synergy sit tight in one of the courtyards in the map's center, but get caught out and encircled. Two tanks go down fast, and the Synergy can immediately sense they are in trouble - their T1 falls back to hide, to try and save a draw, but Lemming is relentless, immediately using its superiority in numbers to overwhelm each tank in turn. Synergy's T1 doesn't move, but in the last two seconds, it is one shotted.

First game, to Lemming.

The next map up they are playing on Prokhorovka. This is a more open map, which has some deceptive rises that cut the map into quarters, and a single, dominating hill on one flank.

With one win under their belts already, Lemming can afford to play cautiously, and let Synergy come to them, but instead, everyone rushes for the center, despite this being a great map for camping.

After the initial rush forward, the game again becomes one of cat and mouse. Lemming, apparently known for having a poor hit ratio, show why that doesn't matter - they're happy to use shots simply to suppress and keep their opponent thinking.

In the end it's a tactic that works. Synergy pushes a little too far forward, without support, and Lemming pounces. In a few seconds it's all over - Lemming wins again, and wins the entire round.

WorldMags.net

SOMA

The ocean is terrifying. It doesn't require embellishment or polish; its fury comes through well enough on its own. Rapture was submerged for a reason – the reminder that you could be drowned at any moment is a terrifying prick at your subconscious.

So it is with SOMA, the upcoming title from Frictional Games, the team behind 2010's Amnesia: The Dark Descent. The entire game, set on the ocean floor, is less Rapture and more Event Horizon, but with plenty of what made the group's first game so memorable. Perhaps, even, to its detriment.

The demo starts with the player character – Simon – climbing through an organic-looking tunnel into what looks like some sort of space station. "Looks like" being the operative phrase here, as the player quickly finds out this facility is miles beneath the ocean floor.

Grimy and mechanical, the station has all the creaks and groans of what you'd expect in a Frictional title. Every bang, crash and muffled groan of creaking metal gives the simultaneous impression you're being watched and the station itself is falling apart. It's scary enough, and the sound design gives a solid impression what you're hearing isn't human, but it's also a little formulaic. "Ooohhhh I'm coming to get you" is a thin tactic by now, and although it provides a little jolt at the beginning, quickly becomes old.

For the most part, however, our time with SOMA was about exploration. During the early part of the game there wasn't much to do other than walk around and explore your surroundings – which are pretty disturbing.

> ""The entire game, set on the Ocean floor is less Rapture and more Event Horizon in nature"

Mechanical/organic matter appears to be taking over the station, taking a cue from Dead Space, although it isn't fully explained.

In fact, not much is explained at all. It's clear something has happened – the station is damaged and bodies appear here and there. It's the job of the player to figure out what, with the help of a nifty device. Characters in SOMA have had implants installed in their brains, which reveal the last 10 seconds of whatever happened to them.

Thomas Grip, creative director at SOMA, says this came out of frustration with audio logs in other horror games – they ask the player to suspend their belief.

"But in SOMA we want the player to take the world seriously and players should be able to think of the placements. The goal is for the placement to tell just as much story as the recording itself. And corpses are a good way to do this. The whole idea also neatly fit with our theme on consciousness and the like."

All of this is fine enough. But the ocean floor is where SOMA really shines – and where it has the best chance of standing alongside Amnesia.

The effect of a hazy horizon on the ocean floor contributes to a dreamlike-quality, combined with the refracted light from the various stations and hubs from all around you. Sea life appears here and there, but not often, once again adding to this sense of isolation.

The unexplained surroundings are just as strange. We came across some sort of downed spacecraft, confirmed by an audio log revealing the "ship" had crashed.

The scares don't stop while underwater, either. As we were entering a station, a shape appeared on the roof and a drilling sound began.

DEVELOPER FRICTIONAL
PUBLISHER FRICTIONAL
DUE EARLY 2015
www.somagame.com

WorldMags.net

At one point, we spent about half an hour trying to make our way on the ocean floor from one objective to another. This ambiguous geography is most definitely by design – getting lost on the ocean floor is terrifying, as dreadful as any haunted mansion. The player's breathing apparatus has infinite oxygen, but this actually adds to the dread - you have bigger things to be worried about.

Just as Amnesia stripped you of weapons, SOMA gives you nothing to carry, apart from when you're solving a simple puzzle to open a door. It's standard fare – plug the fuse into the correct slot – but you still never quite put aside the idea you have nothing to protect yourself with. That feeling exacerbates when you first come across the game's primary monsters – the Jiangshi.

Zombies, essentially. We're told by a companion over radio to not trust them, which seems unnecessary. Who trusts a zombie? In any case, running away is your only course of action, with the suspicion there is obviously more to these enemies than is being revealed. And you'll definitely want to run. Wandering through a game without seeing anyone for two hours and then finally happening upon a zombie, which happens to mess with your vision and other senses, is enough to send you packing.

In the meantime, however, most of SOMA is made up of puzzles. Grip says the team always wants to make the player do something, and have that contribute to the story.

"For instance if you are looking for a key you stumble upon narrative clues along the way. It is important that the player feels like they are playing a story and not just reading about things that occurred in the past."

"So while you can enjoy just walking around like you said, we want to make sure to spice that up whenever we can. And then of course we want sections that are much more focused on the present, such as hiding from a monster or just taking part in some event that unfolds. Getting the right balance for that is tricky and requires a lot of testing.

SOMA is still a while away – Grip says the game won't be out until 2015, by which time Amnesia will be nearly five years old. At this point it's difficult to see whether SOMA will be anything more than a different version of the same game, in an unfamiliar setting.

However, what we've seen is encouraging. By fusing the gameplay with more narrative than in Amnesia, the player feels a little more agency over what's happening – even though they're still essentially fumbling in the dark.

Patrick Stafford.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

WORLD OF SPEED

Racing games are tricky. Those who love them really love them, and getting a head start can be difficult against such experienced drivers. With the rise of racing MMOs, that's become even harder – and it might be where World of Speed may have an edge.

The game is built on turning traditional racing principles on their head. Finishing a race ahead of your competitors is only one way of winning. Instead, players are given a variety of objectives to complete, such as reach the finish line without damage, drift a certain number of metres, lead the race for a particular amount of time, and so on.

The racing genre has been emphasizing social in the last year or so, especially with Need for Speed: Rivals last year and Sony's upcoming Driveclub. It's no different here – the "Airfield" allows you to show off your cars with others, and if you do well on a particular track your name and brand is placed there for others to see.

We played one track in San Francisco, and sure enough, we were able to win by focusing on objectives. This creates nice moments between the players, who may notice you trying to achieve some objectives and then go out of their way to stop you.

"You don't have to be great at racing to be great at racing," says Slightly Mad producer Pete Morrish. "It's slightly more of a strategic racer."

Make no mistake, this is not a "serious" racing game, in the vein of something like Gran Turismo, instead leaning towards the Need for Speed-style arcade feel and aesthetic. But there's something here for the casual racing fan, especially as coming first won't dictate a win. If you've ever felt like you love racing but get left in the dust too much, this may be the title to drag you back in.

DEVELOPER SLIGHTLY MAD
PUBLISHER MY.COM
DUE TBA
http://worldofspeed.com/

ARMORED WARFARE

What is it with tanks lately? World of Tanks in 2010 has become a giant, with its micro transaction value exceeding that of World of Warcraft at more than $US300 million. Namco Bandai tried to at least replicate some of that success with Tank Tank Tank on the Wii U in 2012, although it went nowhere.

Obsidian, of all companies, is trying to carve a chunk of this success with its own effort, Armored Warfare. The game, which the company calls "free to compete", is a tactical military game in which players drive tanks and shoot each other. There isn't much to it, although Obsidian says players will be able to play both competitively and in co-op modes.

The environments are actually quite nice for such a game, with most of the terrain completely destructible. It adds weight to what otherwise would be an arcade game, and during much of our 30-minute session we spent a lot of time testing out how buildings fall apart.

But this has more of an arcade feel than a sophisticated shooter. The handling of the tanks isn't as tight in something like Battlefield, and frankly, at times was so off-the-mark it was hard to determine where the target was pointing. But Obsidian says the difference here is that everything is authentic. Unlike World of Tanks, this is all about replicating real-world vehicles and making them seem heavy and powerful.

That said, the shooting is satisfying enough with enough kick to make you think about timing for your next shot. Each tank model is armored differently and requires some thinking about where exactly you want to shoot.

Producer Eron Garcia tells us players will be drawn by the ability to customise tanks and weaponry. Authentic? Maybe. But enough to draw enough of a crowd to compete with something as big as World of Tanks? Such sloppy handling suggests at this point, probably not.

DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN
PUBLISHER MY.COM
DUE TBA
Aw.my.com

WorldMags.net

SKYFORGE

With so many MMOs competing for attention, especially as the popularity of World of Warcraft begins to wane, being original and innovative is crucial. Skyforge doesn't just fail in that department, it fails at being anything more than average.

Developed by Russian studio Allods Team with some "Westernisation" help from Obsidian, Skyforge is set in a land spliced between science fiction and fantasy. We weren't told much of a back story, instead thrust straight into combat with two classes: a Paladin and a Cryomancer, although publisher My.com says there'll be 10 classes at launch.

The environments are completely generic MMO fare. Our session was set in a type of waterside mountain crop, with various enemies to fight before a large boss. Although this is pre-alpha footage, there is nothing here to make the environment seem distinct from hundreds of other locations in something like WOW.

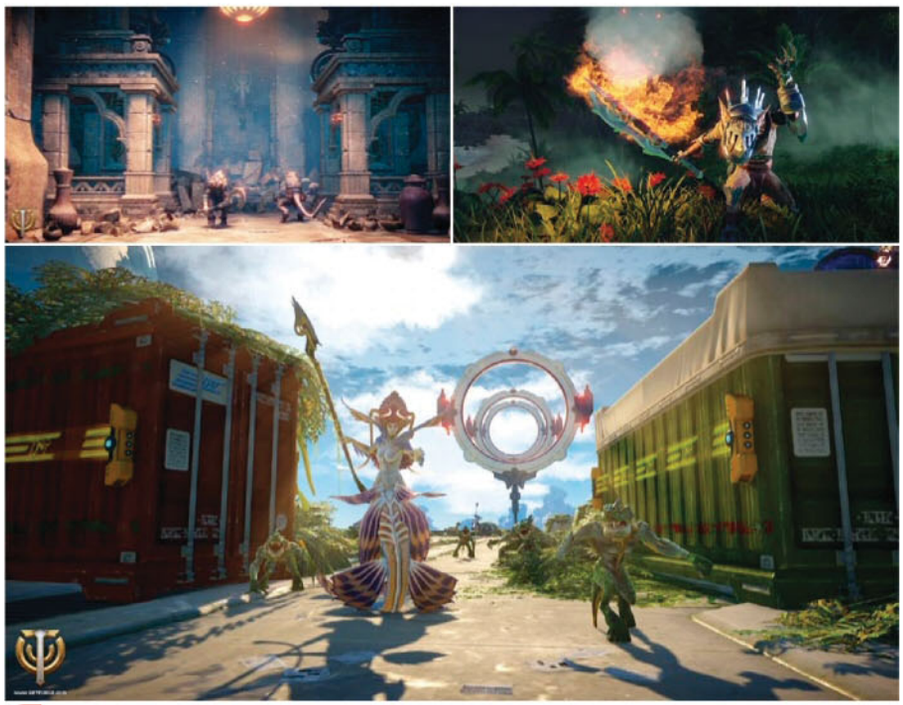
Combat is fine enough, and quite a lot can be done with the mouse, which is a nice change. The Cryomancer is able to deal devastating blows by either slinging magic missiles or charging shots for a few seconds. There is enough variety in the skills that combat never feels boring.

In fact, the combat is perhaps the best part of the game. This isn't about random clicks and slashes like in Diablo. Instead, this is an action-focused game. The characters jump and skip around, looking something more like Dante out of Devil May Cry. We almost had fun. Unfortunately, combat isn't enough to sustain what appears to be a generic fantasy game. We were told to kill a bunch of lizard-type monsters on the way to a boss. Even with context, this would have been a grinding mission. Without, it was a slog to finish.

Another gripe: This is 2014. Our player character, a woman, was not dressed in combat-appropriate attire. The art was completely exploitative and negated the developer's promises this was meant to be an action game with some bite, able to distinguish itself from other MMOs.

Our half an hour with this game was admittedly early, but nevertheless, not impressive. At this point, Skyforge seems like a completely forgettable experience, one that will be left aside by much more sophisticated efforts on the way from much more advanced and reputable developers. Here's hoping the introduction of some story can give it some juice.

DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN
PUBLISHER MY.COM
DUE TBA
Sf.my.com



WorldMags.net

THE HARDEST MURDER TO SOLVE
IS YOUR OWN

THE HUNT BEGINS 5TH JUNE

/MURDERED /MURDERED /MURDEREDSOULSUSPECT MURDERED.COM

Supernatural themes, violence and coarse language

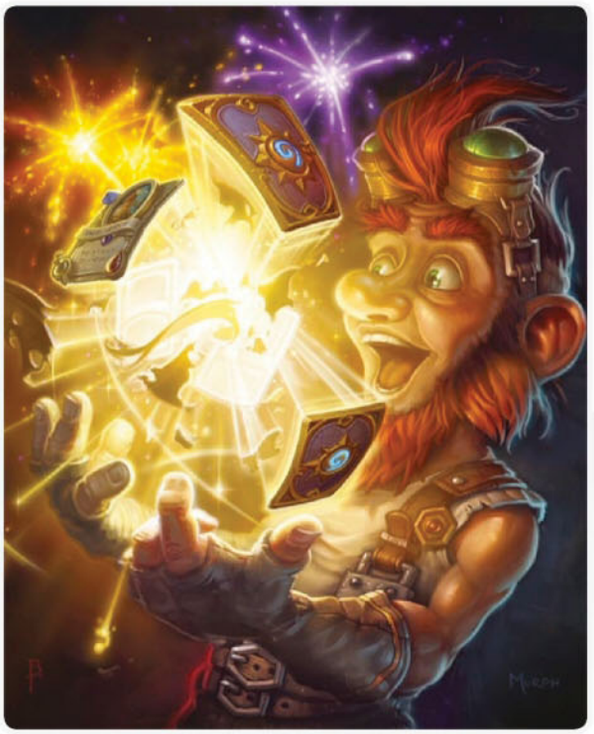
PC PS4 PS3 PlayStation 3 PlayStation Network XBOX ONE XBOX 360 SQUARE ENIX

MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT © 2014 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. All rights reserved. "PS", "PlayStation", "PS3", "PS3" and "PS" are trademarks of Sony Computers Entertainment Inc. "PS4" is a trademark of the same company. ©2014 Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. All rights reserved. AMD, the AMD Arrow logo, Radeon and combinations thereof are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

POWERED BY
REPUBLIC OF GAMERS



REVIEW CONTENTS

50 Dark Souls II
54 Hearthstone
56 The Elder Scrolls Online
58 Child of Light
63 Cardhunter: Attack of the Artifacts

It has been astonishing watching Hearthstone spread its influence through the games industry locally, with seemingly everyone from journalists to a lot of the PR people I know succumbing to that heady mix of easy to learn, hard to master gaming that Blizzard does so well. For a game with little more to it than virtual cards and deep strategy it is astonishing, and the fact Blizzard has made it work cross platform between PC and iPad is amazing, opening up a whole new audience of players. It is, of course a game that can be made in this way, thanks to the slow pace eliminating any control or responsiveness issues. While very much aware that it isnt the first computerised trading card game to exist, it is clear that Blizzard is doing what it does best and bringing the niche genre to a mass market audience. It is going to be fascinating to see the direction that Blizzard takes the game in, and we wouldnt be surprised to see other franchises get the treatment over time. Regardless we really cant see this as being the endpoint, rather the beginning of yet another groundswell for Blizzard

JOHN GILLOOLY
Editor
jgillooly@nextmedia.com.au

SCORING SYSTEM | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better – though 10 is by no means a "perfect" game. We're not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn't excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses – the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you'll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!

WE PLAY ON ORIGIN!

During our frequent trips across Australia and around the globe, when we get that gaming itch, we just grab our EON 17S Origin Laptop. Extreme is the word, our lappy runs a 4GB GDDR5 NVIDIA GeForce GTX 680M Graphics card pumped out through an amazing Full HD 17.3-inch display at 1920x 180, and has the brains of an Overclocked Intel Extreme Edition Core i7-3920XM Quad-Core 4.5GHz chipset to run everything. Add to that 32GB DDR3 1600MHz Memory and a 480GB Intel 520 Series - Solid State Drive and you have one serious mobile gaming solution. Don't just take our word for it, you can check them out yourselves at ***www.originpc.com.au*** and tell em' PCPowerPlay sent ya'!

ORIGIN

WE PLAY WITH TURTLE BEACH!

When we are looking to get our game on, without the rest of the world hearing us, we strap on our Turtle Beach Ear Force Z6A cans. Packing an amazing eight acoustically angled premium speakers, including dual 40mm woofers, the Z6A's are powered by a powerful 5.1 channel amp with bass amplification, its perfect for tracking those pesky footsteps. The Z6A amplifier gives you quick access to independent controls for all 5.1 audio channels, letting you tune your Z6A for any gaming situation. The headset and amplifier also feature a quick disconnect so you can easily detach it without having to unplug the 5.1 outputs from your computer. Don't just take our word for it, grab a pair yourself. For more info click through to ***www.turtlebeachau.com***

We Use and Recommend
TURTLE BEACH
www.TurtleBeachAU.com

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

REVIEW

Dark Souls II

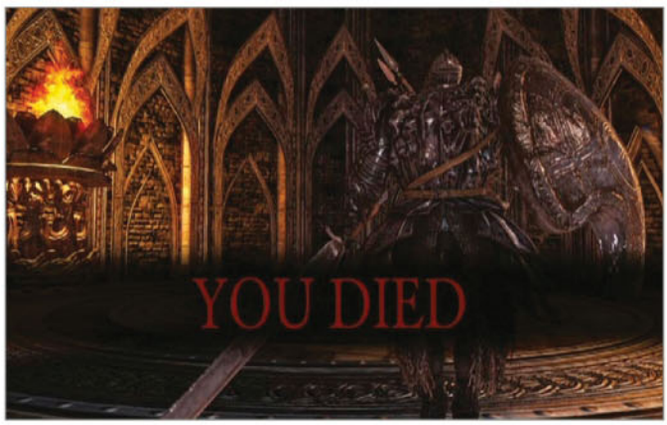
Though it has arrived a little late, this is the definitive experience

DEVELOPER FROMSOFTWARE
PUBLISHER NAMCOBANDAI
PRICE $79.99
OFLC M
AVAILABLE AT RETAIL, STEAM
www.darksoulsii.com

Before we start things off, let's get one thing straight. Dark Souls II is a damn good game. Well, it's more than good. It's great. The gaming community as a whole has generally been unified on this stance since the game's inferior release on the console world, yet if you're reading this magazine, you're already well aware of the restrictions that world implies. The real question here is will Dark Souls II's greatness transfer onto our beloved PCs? Or will we be left with some deformed monstrosity of an age long passed, only to be trapped by the confines of its console origins? Before we can answer that there are a few things we need to go over.

It's no secret the Souls series has a troubled history with the golden realm of PC titles. Demon's Souls has sadly never had a proper port, largely due to a combination of ownership, sales and FromSoftware's lack of PC knowhow, previously having focused only on titles for console. Dark Souls, on the other hand, was free of this first constraint and its popular console reception helped push it over the edge, yet it would soon be apparent that FromSoftware were still being hindered by that latter ball and chain.

Despite this, the Japanese devs were always upfront about the demons that plagued their PC attempts. When initially asked how the Dark Souls port was coming along, producer Daisukle Uchiyama stated "To be completely honest, we're having a tough time doing it due to our lack of experience and knowledge in terms of porting to PC. First we thought it would be a breeze, but it's turned out not to be the case. We're still developing right now – we're crunching - [and it's turned out to be] more strictly a port from the console version. We haven't been able to step up into doing any specific optimisation for PC." When the battle was over, the result was as unfortunate as one would expect from such an announcement. Awkward controls, blurry visuals and a mediocre frame rate led to a game that was a mere shadow of its consolian brother.



"The smoother framerate makes the timing of parrying, blocking and rolls all the more accurate"

But the Souls series has always inspired a strange kinship in its players, one that has slowly formed from its obscure content, encouraging a sense of "jolly cooperation". And so it was that, within days of release, Peter 'Durante' Thoman did wield his modding sword to cut through the main issues, releasing the celebrated DSFix to the public. The mod essentially made the game much more user friendly, inspiring other modders to work on textures, controls and so on and so forth to create a Dark Souls experience that left its console brethren in the dust. Sure, it wasn't perfect, especially considering the arduous process one had go to through to achieve the final result, but it did offer an experience that, in essence, is very much linked with the Souls series - rewarding players who were willing to put in the effort.

FromSoftware were lucky. Thanks to some talented (and extremely efficient) fans, they were able to recover from a blunder that should have proved fatal, yet somehow the PC community were still on their side. Even so, one thing remained clear, FromSoftware had to lift their game if they wanted to avoid going hollow.

So what did they do?

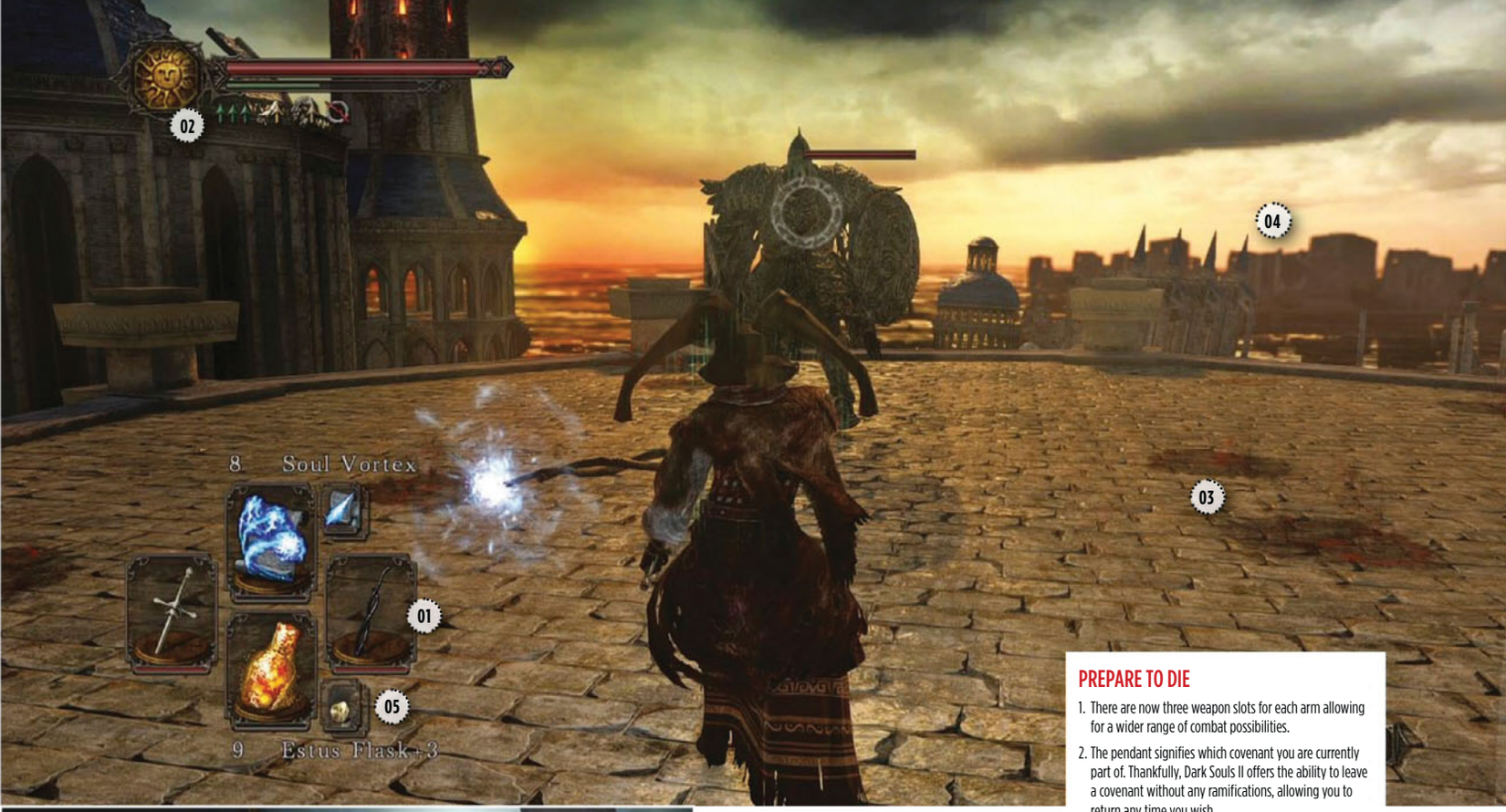
In what seems like a fairy tale ending, FromSoftware sent their best PC smiths to the forge to build an entirely new engine for Dark Souls II, going forward to use the PC as the lead test platform for both iterations of the title this time around.

The final result is a game that is able to run and render at 1920 x 1080, providing a crisp and sharp experience. On top of this, the PC version runs at a tight 60 frames per second (as opposed to the console's standard 30 frames) allowing for a more accurate execution of moves and abilities. Despite being aesthetically pleasing, this actually makes a world of difference to the gameplay itself. Dark Souls II's combat, much like it's predecessors, is entirely reaction based, with the slightest delay spelling the difference between gaining and losing an ungodly sum of souls. The smoother frame rate makes the timing of parrying, blocking and rolls all the more accurate, allowing highly skilled players to weave between attacks with anime-esque precision. Furthermore, the functions themselves appear to perform more accurately in the PC build. Those familiar with the console version may have noticed a slight button lag when sprinting or jumping, an upset that, while not entirely fixed, has been improved with the PC edition.

But of all the improvments the PC world offers Dark Souls II, by far the most important is the load times. One of the game's new features is the ability to warp between bonfires, demanding that you warp back to the land of Majula (the games main hub) whenever you want to level up your character. Previously, this came as a tiresome inclusion, especially considering the first title allowed you to level up at any bonfire you decided to rest your tush beside. In this version, players are able to warp between three bonfires in the time it would take the console version to load one, leading for a much smoother experience and making Majula trips a breeze.

The keyboard and mouse controls are much more

WorldMags.net

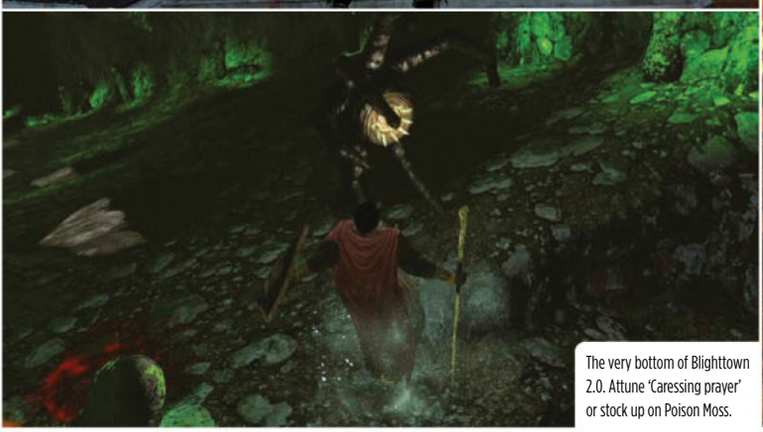


PREPARE TO DIE

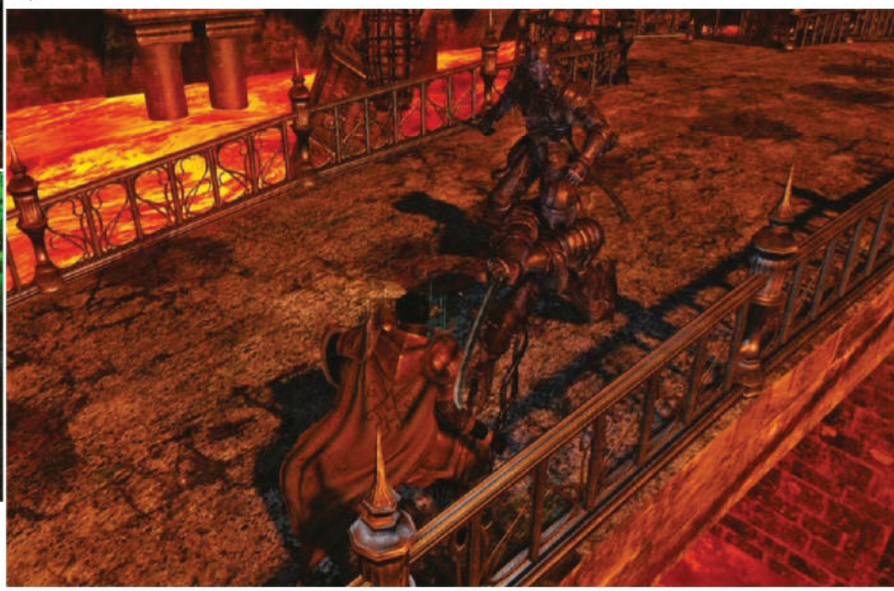
1. There are now three weapon slots for each arm allowing for a wider range of combat possibilities.
2. The pendant signifies which covenant you are currently part of. Thankfully, Dark Souls II offers the ability to leave a covenant without any ramifications, allowing you to return any time you wish.
3. The blood stains signal other players who have died before you. By activating a blood stain, you get a ghostly glimpse of how they lost their feeble lives.
4. Heide's Tower of Flame looks particularly nice on PC with its crisp textures and vivid colours. Unfortunately it means the blurry canvas backgrounds stand out a little more in contrast.
5. On top of Estus Flasks, Life Gems can now be used to gradually restore life - an enemy drop that was sorely missed in previous games..

A sure way to make gamers cry is to create enemies whose weapons are bigger than your entire body...

Dodging required when one has drawn the attention of more than one enemy.

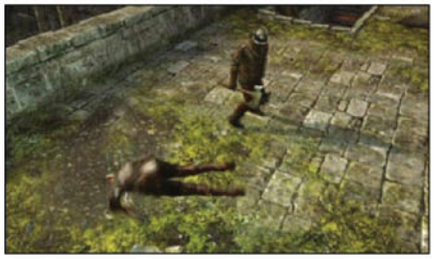


The very bottom of Blighttown 2.0. Attune 'Caressing prayer' or stock up on Poison Moss.



DUEL WIELDING BRO

1. Taste the power of my right hand strike!



2. Eep! dodge.

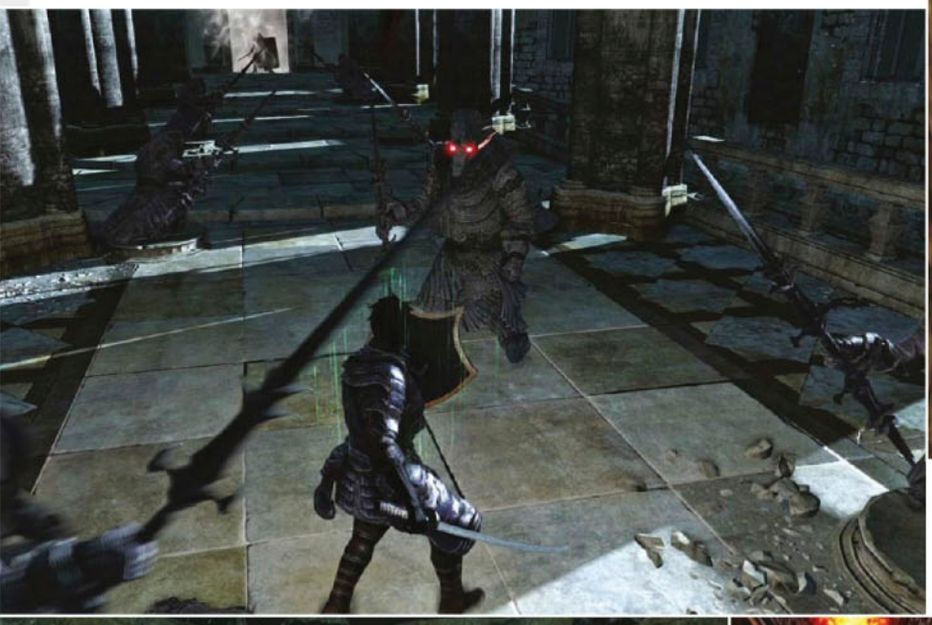
3. No use dancing around it, may as well just finish this off hey?

WorldMags.net

Even the Drangleic's NPC's can be frightening.

You'll encounter many enemies wearing heavy armour with or without a shield ...or even using two!

The Emerald Herald will never let you forget to "Seek souls, larger more powerful souls."



Be summoned as a 'SunBro' again, cross the gaps between the worlds, and engage in jolly co-operation!

Torches provide some amazing atmospheric moments, not only lighting up areas but also acting as a powerful weapon against certain foes.

Venture into Shrine of Amana. Homing projectiles and the Demon of Song are what await you.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

effective this time around, with remappable buttons and keys allowing for a customizable experience. Yet for some reason FromSoftware left the tacky Xbox interface for action prompts, meaning you'll need to stay on top of your key allocation as finding the green "A" button on your keyboard may prove futile. Generally, I found that the controller made for a more comfortable fit, not really a surprise considering the game was designed with controller functionality in mind, but I have no doubt that purists will be able to make the keyboard and mouse work just as effectively… even if it does take a little bit longer. An upside for those who tread the purist path comes with the decision to make the mouse appear in menu screens, a small blessing, but one that leads to quicker item browsing and equipping without having to address every single item in the menu.

For Souls veterans, gameplay follows in a very similar stream, only its mechanics have been tightened and tweaked to allow for greater variation in class configuration. One of the most notable aspects is the ability to effectively dual wield, as your left hand now can strike with both light and heavy attacks, while also allowing for special dual attacks when wielding two of the same weapon. There's so much choice here, as the weapons list in Dark Souls II alone is incredibly large, providing a vast array of maces, sword, bows, staves, axes, shields and spears to sate whichever path you choose to roam, not to mention deciding whether you'lll fight one handed or two handed, weapon and shield or weapon and magic etc. There are even specialty weapons such as whips, catalysts and claws, all of which have their own unique combination of attacks, keeping combat fresh and exciting.

"The resolution is sharper and textures are more pronounced but it still looks last gen"

For those looking for something to sick your teeth into, Drangleic offers a huge world to explore so newcomers can expect to clock up at least 70 hours in their first playthrough, give or take a few depending on how much jolly cooperation and online PvP one decides to attempt. On top of this, FromSoftware have gone out of their way to add a bunch of new content to New Game+, inserting altered boss fights, increased enemies and new items that simply aren't accessible in a single playthrough.

But by far the best part of any Souls game is the lore. FromSoftware have built their name around their epically derelict landscapes that speak of a bygone age and, while most of what lies within these landscapes may never be found by the player, that's where the brilliance of Dark Souls II's design lies. Everything they create has a purpose, whether or not that purpose will be realised by the user matters not, for it only adds to the authentication of their landscapes. It allows for the explorers among us to delve deep into the world, theorise and discuss their findings without a definitive answer lying a click away in some forum, a concept rarely found in games these days. At the same time, those who are content with simply playing through the game, cutting down the monsters and men that cross their path, can still do so without heavy slabs of text or lengthy cut scenes getting in their way.

It's evident that the PC versions numerous little tweaks all work towards a much more enjoyable Dark Souls II experience, yet the game is in no way a rebuild of its counterparts, as the mechanics, environments and combat all dance to the same tune as the console version. Yes, the resolution is sharper, offering textures that are more pronounced, but it still very much looks like a last gen game, so if you are looking for a title that pushes the boundaries of current tech DSII is not it. But don't let this throw you off, as it is still an incredible sight to behold. At first I was a little disappointed with some of the area designs, lamenting the use of canvas backgrounds and closed in spaces, but as the game progresses the environments open up to offer some truly awe inspiring stages that will stick with me for a long time to come.

For all these reasons, it has to be said that the PC version of Dark Souls II undoubtedly provides the definitive DSII experience to date. If I had one complaint, it would be that the lighting, while offering a better light/dark contrast than the previous installments, is still a far cry from what we were shown in the mirror knight previews way back when. But hey, considering they don't have to worry about fixing a broken game this time around, I expect our beloved modding community is already working tirelessly to remedy that.

ALEX MANN PC

WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You understand that pain is arbitrary.
- You hate being fed information.
- You like your fantasy as black as midnight on a moonless night.
- You read Kentaro Muira's Berserk.
- You have a death wish.

OR TRY THIS

DARK SOULS (WITH MODS!)
FROMSOFTWARE • 2011
Great with Mods
Needs Mods

DEMON'S SOULS
FROMSOFTWARE • 2009
Arguably the hardest of the three
Needs Playstation

MINECRAFT
MOJANG • 2009
Just as cryptic
Less Lore

VERDICT The definitive Dark Souls II experience, the latest entry to The Souls series shines on the PC.

9

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

REVIEW

Hearthstone

Everybody's favourite 30 minute cooldown gets its own game

DEVELOPER BLIZZARD
PUBLISHER ACTIVISION BLIZZARD
PRICE Free to Play
AVAILABLE AT ONLINE (BATTLE.NET)
www.battle.net

Hearthstone, is a game designed being able to play in short bursts that is very hard to step away from, a trading card game that will only grow in size and popularity from here on out.

Historically Blizzard hasn't really done small projects, instead swinging its enormous weight behind a handful of big budget affairs. Because of this Hearthstone, and the (still in Alpha) Heroes of The Storm are incredibly significant titles, a sign of Blizzard moving well beyond the well-defined walls built around each franchise and delivering something new for the company.

Or at least a different spin on things. At heart Hearthstone is a deeply strategic game, based upon the concept of trading card games, and sculpted around the Character classes and NPCs from the Warcraft universe. It is a game for those who look at TCGs like Magic: The Gathering and worry they are too complex or that they don't have the group of friends needed to play such games. But it is also a title for recovering WoW addicts, as well as the seriously hardcore TCG community, and has delivered a game that appeals to a wide range of players, with near frictionless multiplayer, cross platform play between the PC and iOS devices, and that ephemeral ingredient that keeps people coming back for just one more go.

At the moment the game involves three modes, with a fourth single player section announced but not released when the review was written. These modes are a single player vs AI practice mode, normal multiplayer, and The Arena.

When you start out the game funnels you into practice, where it shows the basics of the game and introduces you to each of the nine available classes. You unlock the ability to play as them by defeating them in practice mode, and then you'll likely want to pick one and focus on building up a more powerful deck.

There are two kinds of cards in Hearthstone, basic and expert. Expert cards come from packs that you can buy or win in The Arena, whereas basic cards get unlocked as you level up heroes. Each Hero has its own set of cards, and there is also a general pool from which everyone can draw. You get to build a deck of 30 such cards, which is where the learning process in Hearthstone begins, and you start getting a good idea of the inherent complexities of the game, and the deep strategy underneath.

> "This ever changing strategy is what gives Hearthstone its hook and matches their great pace"

Building a good deck involves being able to balance around luck of the draw, pre-emptive counters to what an opponent might do and a modicum of strategy on how you can deplete your opponent's 30 health points. You'll have a mental picture of how you want the cards to play, and how you can use them, but you need to be prepared with the tools to react to things not going your way.

These decks can then be used to practice more, battle friends or play against others randomly selected by the game. There are both ranked and casual modes to play, and the vast majority will actually get more out of ranked mode, where the matchmaking will throw you up against suitably skilled opponents. Join one of these matches and a coin toss determines who goes first, then gives you the ability to redraw any of the cards given in your initial hand. Here the strategy gets even more important, and the initial temptation to hang onto high cost cards that won't be playable for several rounds gives way to scrambling to ensure your hand is focused on getting through the first rounds unscathed.

As the game rolls on player's mana pools grow, allowing them to play stronger and stronger cards, but it the outcome of a match is always dependant on the initial stages, where skirmishes must be fought for fear of letting the opponent set themselves up to lay down massive damage on your hero. Ignore things at your peril - that 1 health, 1 attack sheep created by a mage's polymorph spell needs killing before a couple of buffs turn it into a death dealing embodiment of embarrassment. Or maybe it is best to let the opponent play a bunch of minion cards then destroy them all with a powerful area of effect spell.

This ever changing strategy is what really gives Hearthstone its hook - turns are timed but not too long, so it feels like the antithesis of the frenetic paced strategy delivered by a the Starcraft and Warcraft RTS games, and matches always seem wonderfully paced.

In the Arena things change up a bit, with an entry fee of $2 real world cash or 150 ingame gold. Here you are presented with a random set of card choices, which you use to build a deck. You then use this to compete, building up the quality of your prize with each win, and bowing out once you suffer three defeats.

You can rake in enough gold so that you aren't spending a lot of real money, which is refreshing given the nature of some free to play titles. The other monetisation aspect of the game is the cards themselves, which you can purchase packs of from Blizzard. While you'll find it worthwhile making an initial outlay on cards, the game is designed in such a way that once you have your deck rolling you'll find less impetus to buy cards.

Blizzard has delivered a truly excellent game with Hearthstone, one that lets you play in short bursts or long marathons, while delivering deep strategy and satisfying wins and losses. We can't wait to see where it goes from here. *JOHN GILLOOLY* PC

WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You can beat Freecell in record time
- Your therapist strongly advises you to not reinstall World of Warcraft
- You lack the APM needed to pwn noobs in Starcraft
- Battle.net keeps reminding you to

OR TRY THIS

MAGIC THE GATHERING DOTP
STAINLESS GAMES • 2014
+ The granddaddy of such games
- Huge legacy proves daunting to newcomers

CARD HUNTERS
BLUE MANCHU • 2013
+ Not just a card game
- Dungeon crawling isn't for everyone

WINDOWS SOLITAIRE
MICROSOFT • 1990
+ The one game with more legs than WoW
- Lacks depth

VERDICT A gem that combines a great PC franchise with simple gameplay and a reasonable Free to Play business model.

9

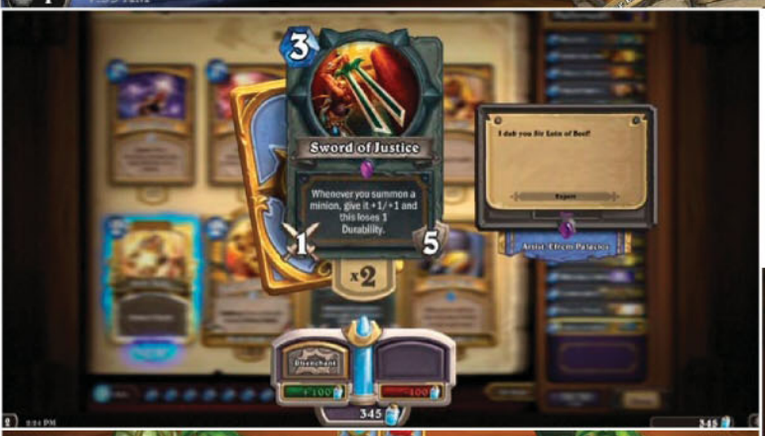
WorldMags.net

OH SNAP!

1. Your Hero determines what pool of cards you can build with, and comes with a special ability.
2. The mage special ability is a 1 damage fireball spell.
3. The blue icon in the center of the card denotes rarity, which uses the standard Blizzard Blue/Purple/Orange setup
4. This is your mana pool, needed for playing cards, it starts out at one and grows each turn.
5. Your cards sit down here, and you can hold up to a maximum of 10 of them at any one time.
6. This minion has a taunt effect, which means the opponent will have to take it out of play in order to attack others. This can be done through various means such as outright destruction or silencing.

The crafting system in the game lets you destroy excess cards and create new ones (you can only have two of each normal card, and one of each legendary, in a deck)

The Arena involves choosing a deck of 30 cards when you enter, where you get a chance to pick one from a set of three cards until your deck is full.



Legendary cards are usually best kept for finishing moves, and one can't help but yell 'Many Whelps, Handle It!' when Onyxia is played.

MOTHER OF DRAGONS

1. With both players on equal health, and a taunt minion blocking Alexstraza's way this looks like a stalemate.

2. However two cards turn the tide, one minion give a Windfury buff, which allows two attacks per turn, then everyone gets Bloodlust

3. Bloodlust adds +3 to each of your minions attack for the turn, and Alexstraza is able to quickly two shot the Warlock and win.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

The Elder Scrolls Online

Over the past month a few of us around the PC PowerPlay offices have been sinking our teeth into Elder Scrolls Online, a study into reviewing the unreviewable. Instead of our initial thought of throwing five D20s into the air and counting up the resultant number to ascertain our percentage approval, resident Chosen Ones John Gillooly, David Hollingworth and Daniel Wilks sat down and discussed their time with the game, and whether or not they were feeling it.

DEVELOPER ZENIMAX ONLINE
DISTRIBUTOR BETHESDA
PRICE $90
AVAILABLE AT Retail
www.elderscrollsonline.com

JG – So, let's talk Elder Scrolls Online. We've all been playing it to some degree or another (ok, I've recently been afk crafting, manually making food while playing Hearthstone on a Windows tablet, but I've been logged in at least). What are your thoughts on the game, now that it has been a thing for a month or so?

DH – I'm liking it, despite some really obvious, almost catastrophic flaws. It's a really odd beast. It's almost a classic Elder Scrolls game, but at the cost of a lot of functionality that MMO players take for granted. It does some great things with level advancement and it's skill system, but then seems to punish you for wanting to do something silly like trying to play with a friend!

DW – It's definitely a strange beast. To me it falls halfway between an Elder Scrolls game and an MMO without quite fulfilling the function of either. It looks like an Elder Scrolls game but the sense of character freedom and exploration is all but absent as players are locked into level gated areas that break up major plot threads. It functions somewhat like an MMO but plays like a single player game, with other player often feeling more like interlopers than actual help.

JG – I guess that jarring of single and multiplayer also underpins the dominating thought that I get when I've been playing. I just don't know if I can face that journey to level cap, I worry whether it is just me, or whether the relatively slow pace of levelling skills and abilities is working against my enjoyment. The Elder Scrolls is very much a game of tangents, wondering what is over that hill, walking there, finding a cave along the way and before you know it your urgent main quest is a forgotten memory and you spend your time rearranging books in the headquarters of the guild you have become the head of. In ESO the story keeps throwing you back, acting as a kind of funnel (and one that isn't as balanced as games like WoW or The Old Republic). Was that something you guys have noticed?

"Halfway between an MMO and an Elder Scrolls game without fulfilling the function of either"

DW – Definitely. The story drags you in one direction but that's not necessarily the direction of the level appropriate quests so you feel out of your depth for half the area and wildly overpowered for the other half. TESO utilises a quest hub style structure but doesn't have a particularly logical progression - one of the factions starts you in a main city but if you want level appropriate quests you have to take a boat to a different area, complete the quests there then take another boat to a third area, complete the quests there and then finally make your way back to the "starting" area to do those quests. It doesn't flow.

DH – I think all the factions do that, and it's really jarring to start in one place, get dumped elsewhere, and then told you really need to go back to where you were 'found'. But, one of the things I do like is the ability to skip of that for subsequent characters. Being able to start at level 3 is a nice touch, and one of the things that shows there really is some innovation in amongst all the almost-there mechanics. But it does remain that despite doing, I think, nearly every questline I can, I'm still hitting areas that have mobs two or three levels above me, and I'm getting quest rewards that are similarly over-levelled. Which makes me think I'm missing something, or that maybe questing in a pair - I'm playing with my partner nearly all the time - actually slows down progression.

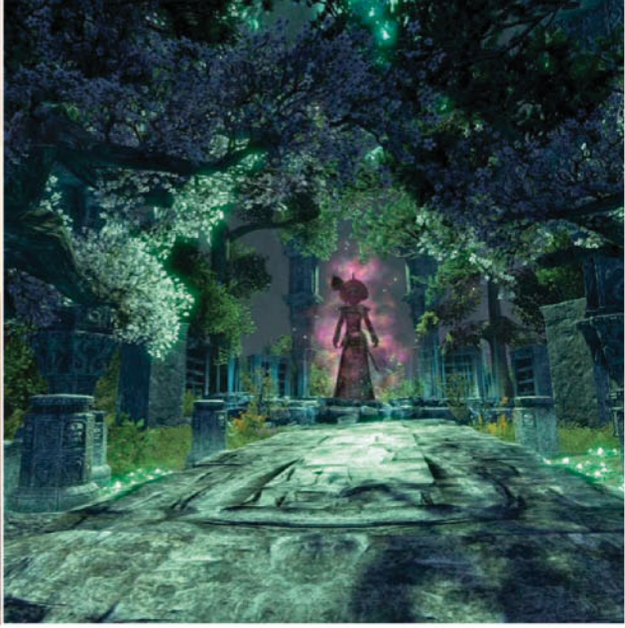
This is exacerbated by the poor quest labelling. You can't work out what quests are meant for groups or will force you to play solo; and the the suggested levels for group dungeons, especially on the f**king Fungal Grotto, are way under-levelled. ESO claims it's a level 12 quest, but current consensus is that it should be held on to until level 16.

But, I still think it's doing some interesting things. Do you guys agree?

JG – After playing through the opening sequence a few times in beta I was happy to see that function, right up until I realised you could easily end up without a suitable weapon by doing so. Playing as part of the Daggerfall Covenant, I then ignored a message sending me on the questline away from the hub, assuming it was some kind of way to swap to another faction's starting zones. This put me well below level for the quests, despite them supposedly being on par, and many deaths occurred. It also meant that when I hit level 5 the chains just stopped, and I was left killing wolves until I hit level 5 and the storyline kicked in again. It just doesn't feel as smooth an introduction as a lot of other MMOs in recent years, and the lack of opaque systems does not help it's case - I know you guys had issues finding the group finder, for example.

DW – It's not particularly obvious as to where it is and especially at low levels it's not hugely effective. TESO is based around the holy trinity when it comes to grouping - a tank, healer and two DPS - but there is little incentive to do anything other than DPS when it comes to effective levelling. There is so much focus on solo or small group play that the defined roles needed for an instance

WorldMags.net



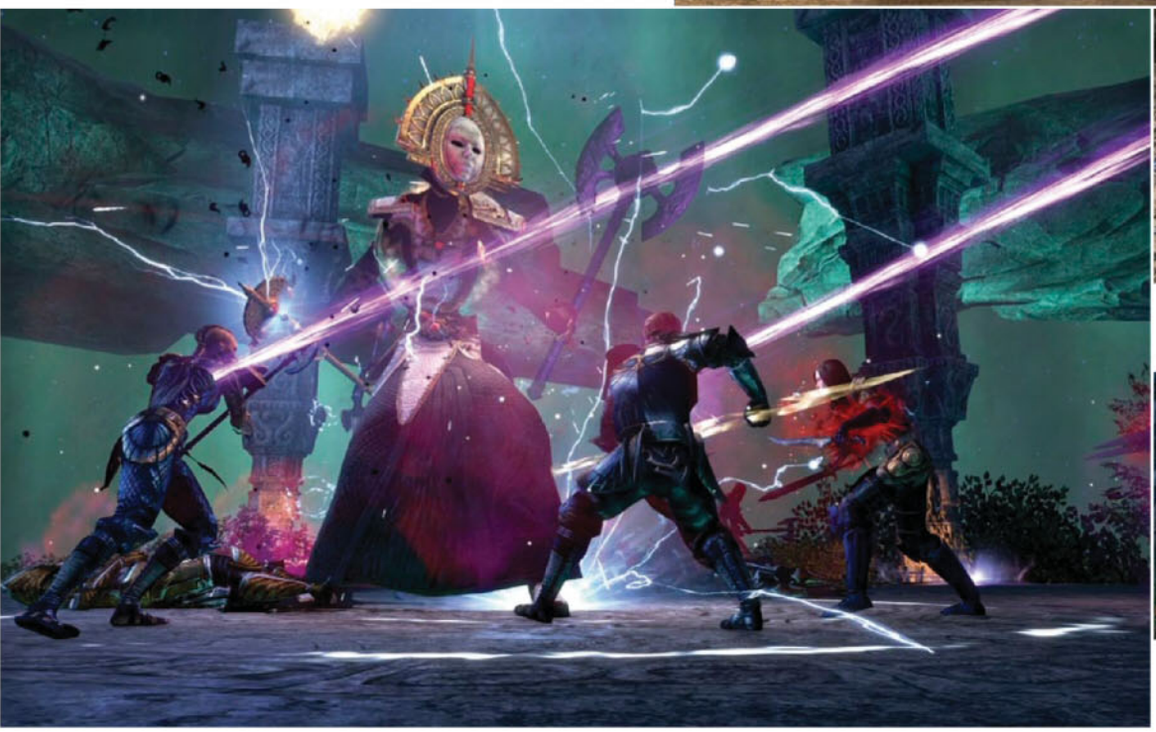
Sadly, while this band of questing types looks like a fun bunch, our experience is that grouping is rare in ESO.

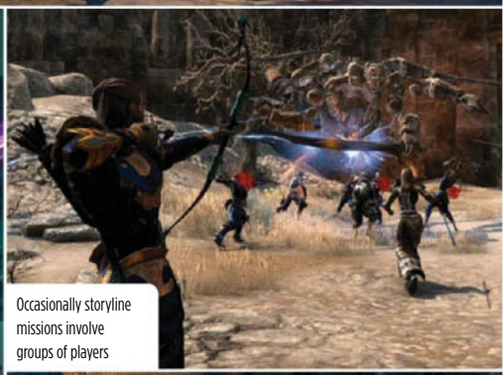
Lets just guess that when this guy spins up those swords, players better evade them.

While a truly gorgeous game, it all feels a bit generically fantastical at times.

Combat via mad flailing of sword is an Elder Scrolls signature.

Boss fights are particularly interesting, with evasion playing a big part.





Occasionally storyline missions involve groups of players

Another most likely important type tells us important things.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

seem even rarer than in most other MMOs. While I don't think that Zenimax have gotten it right with the structure of the game, I think they've done an excellent job with the crafting and combat systems. Of course, the fact that you can craft gear far better than anything you'll get from a quest does kind of make the quest rewards feel pointless.

JG – One of the other things that I seem to like and loathe in equal measure is the way in which abilities are unlocked, and the ease with which you can back yourself into a corner early on. Again, it ties in with the centrality of crafted gear to the experience, but I found that a scarcity of weapon drops had me wanting to swap to different combat styles early on but annoyed that it felt like the skill points were sitting dormant. It is something that I'm sure will be less of an issue towards level cap, but it does impact the overall experience of starting out in the world of ESO.

While it's unfair to judge an MMO solely on its starting zones, it feels like Zenimax Online hasn't baited its hook properly, and my general feeling from the opening parts of the game was that I didn't know if I would enjoy putting in the time to level through the game in the promise of something more. It is one of those near intangible things, like the annoying interface designed to work with a console controller, which made me feel like I was working against, not with the game's systems most of the time.

How did you guys feel the game welcomed you?

DW – For the most part I found much of the starting game standoffish, with questing and levelling not being obvious or linear. That said, I really enjoyed the Aldmeri Dominion starting areas - the story flows well, makes sense and there's a sense of progression, both in a narrative sense and a levelling sense that I found missing in the other two. To go back to skill unlocks, there is a real frustration there I think. The first few skills unlock quickly, but the subsequent skills take forever to unlock, leaving you playing with the same six abilities for what feels like a hugely protracted period.

DH – But for all this, I know I'm still feeling drawn back to it. It's fun to explore, and the class interactions are interesting, if a little opaque. And the fact that crafting is useful is making me craft way more than I usually do in MMOs. Of course, I'm still not sure I'd be willing to drop a monthly sub on the game - but if it were free to play… I think I'd stick with it.

"I'm still feeling drawn back to it. It's fun to explore and the class interactions are interesting"

DW – Not me. I'm not finding much in the way of impetus to keep playing. The most fun I've had was doing a few instances with a good group, but that only happened after days of waiting for the group finder to fill. I'm just not finding it either engrossing or particularly rewarding. The joy of Elder Scrolls games is the ability to see a spot in the distance and go there, or follow an entire story line from beginning to end in one arc. Due to level gating, that appeal is lost in TESO. The joy of MMOs is grouping with friends, smashing instances and reaping the rewards. Due to the strange choices made with loot drops and gearing, as well as the nature of questing and character creation that appeal is all but absent as well. As far as I can see, TESO has tried to be all things to all gamers, and it has failed. Rather than coming together as something special it has instead simply come out as something powerfully adequate.

JG – I'm in a similar place to Mr Wilks, the game is gorgeous to look at and there are certainly some positive aspects but I came to dread my play sessions. The game isn't bad, it just doesn't have that hook that I've found in other MMOs, without a compulsion to keep raising that green bar the game falls back into the standard subscription MMO trap - I ask myself if I can see myself dropping money on the game to keep on playing and I just can't do it. I'm not the hugest fan of the Elder Scrolls universe anyway, but without those hooks that had me pouring days into Skyrim, it just feels like an, albeit pretty, sketch of a fantasy realm that I can't suspend my disbelief in. PC

WorldMags.net

TRANSFORMERS FANS,
COLLECT AND ROLL OUT!

find us on

JB HI-FI

SANITY
GREAT SERVICE, GREAT VALUE

Hasbro Studios

Hasbro

MADMAN

madman.com.au/transformers

HASBRO and its logo, TRANSFORMERS, TRANSFORMERS PRIME, TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED, TRANSFORMERS ARMADA, TRANSFORMERS ENERGON, TRANSFORMERS CYBERTRON and all related logos and characters are trademarks of Hasbro and are used with permission
© 2014 Hasbro All Rights Reserved

WorldMags.net

REVIEW

Child of Light

Offers surprisingly good fight

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL
DISTRIBUTOR UBISOFT
PRICE $19.95
OFLC PG
OUT NOW
childoflight.ubi.com

Plenty of games manage to look pretty, but very few can be called beautiful. Child of Light is one of these games, capturing from the very first moments with its painterly art style, poetic dialog and dreamy gameplay. It isn't what we would usually expect out of developers coming off work on the decidedly down to earth Far Cry 3, but it shows the kind of interesting work being done by Ubisoft with an array of smaller titles, using inhouse technology.

Child of Light is built on the same UbiArt engine that powered Rayman Legends, and this is core to its charm. The engine allows developers to import concept art into the game with little or no hassle, which not only reduces workload and the time it takes to go from prototype to completion, it allows for uniquely styled games such as this to be made. When this graphical richness combines with the lush (yet at times annoyingly repetitive) soundtrack and dialog composed completely of rhymes, the result is a wonderful experience for the senses.

What surprises even more is that this gorgeous veneer sits atop some seriously interesting, and innovative gameplay, a new twist on turn based combat rolled in a crispy outer shell of minimalist platformer. The game revolves around your character, a young girl named Aurora from 19th century Austria who falls into a deathlike sleep. She awakens in a strange land called Lemuria and sets off on a quest to find out what happened to the moon, stars and the sun.

On the way you are accompanied by a firefly called Igniculus and several other characters. Igniculus serves many uses beyond his tendency to provide a ryhminy foil for Aurora's moments of exposition. He can like heal Aurora, help solve puzzles or distract enemies, and he is always controllable via the mouse or right thumb stick on a controller. It means that you effectively play two characters at once, and the interplay is crucial to success.

In the main world you run, and then fly around following clues as to where the celestial bodies have gone, chasing down the Queen of Night. During this platforming phase Igniculus can collect pickups as well as interact with the environment to solve puzzles and distract enemies. This is all fairly standard fare, and it isn't until you actually engage one of these enemies but running into them that you see the underlying jRPG style combat system, one that proves quite hard to master.

> "The dark fairy tale is interesting, but in many ways overwhelmed by the stunning visuals"

The overall combat pacing in the game relies on an initiative bar at the rear of the screen. On it all of the participants move from left to right at varying speeds. At the right hand side is a casting section. When a combatant hits the front of this section they begin casting their attack, and if they make it to the end without being interrupted this succeeds and deals damage to an opposing character.

That is if they make it to the end of the cast, because while casting each creature is vulnerable - if you land a blow on them while they are casting it will interrupt the attack and push them back down the time bar. You can also use Igniculus to slow down the speed of a minion, but it only works on one, and the proper use requires some strategic thinking.

Alongside this sits a system of vulnerabilities to certain elements. Each creature will take increased damage from one kind of element, and be resistant to its native element. You can get around this through careful selection of spells, and the use of appropriate modifications, called Oculi, in your weapons and armor.

What this means is that, in practice, not only do you need to try and juggle cast times to stay uninterrupted, but you'll also want to be sure you are hitting the right minion with the right element to maximise damage. Thankfully you can swap between party members during combat (There is always only one in play). This lets you mix up your weapon damage types and deploy them when needed.

Combat becomes surprisingly complex as you prioritise quite a range of actions and decide which minions pose the biggest threat, all while trying to juggle casts to ensure you interrupt while not being interrupted.

While we loved the combat, we found that the story flagged a little, and never really lived up to its initial promise. The dark fairy tale aspects are interesting, but in many ways overwhelmed by the sheer visual magnificence of the game. We did find a few times that we lost track of where we were heading, thanks to minimal clues and a lack of big glowy arrows on the map.

One thing that didn't quite gel with us was the oculi system, which is a way of introducing RPG light gearing into the game. It just didn't fit as well as we expected, and became a bit fiddly and counterintuitive to keep pace with.

However our issues are very much secondary to the many fantastic aspects of the game, from the look and feel, the interestly different controls and the deeply tactical gameplay. Don't discount it due to looks, there is actually a pretty great tactical combat game underneath, and give it a shot. We guarantee you won't play anything like this for a while.

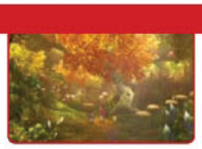
JOHN GILLOOLY PC

WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You are a small Austrian girl from the 1880s who has fallen into a deep sleep
- You find paintings boring when they don't move.
- Your idea of fun is sychronising the alarms on five wristwatches.
- You really liked the Far Cry 3 talent trees

OR TRY THIS

THE BANNER SAGA
STOIC • 2014
+ Tactical turn based combat
- Non interactive overworld



NI NO KUNI
LEVEL 5 • 2013
+ Similarly gorgeous art
- Only on PS3 and DS

FAR CRY 3
UBISOFT • 2013
+ Same devs, more Cassowaries.
- The irony is lost on some.

VERDICT Gorgeous graphics combine with a fantastic combat system to deliver a pretty unique experience.

8

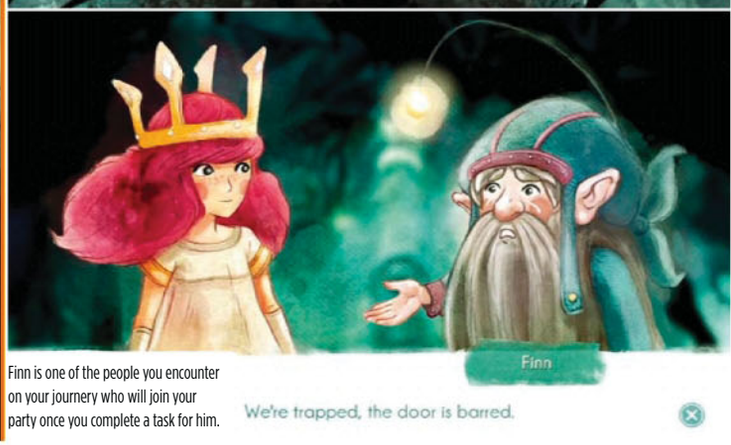
WorldMags.net

DECEPTIVELY COMPLEX

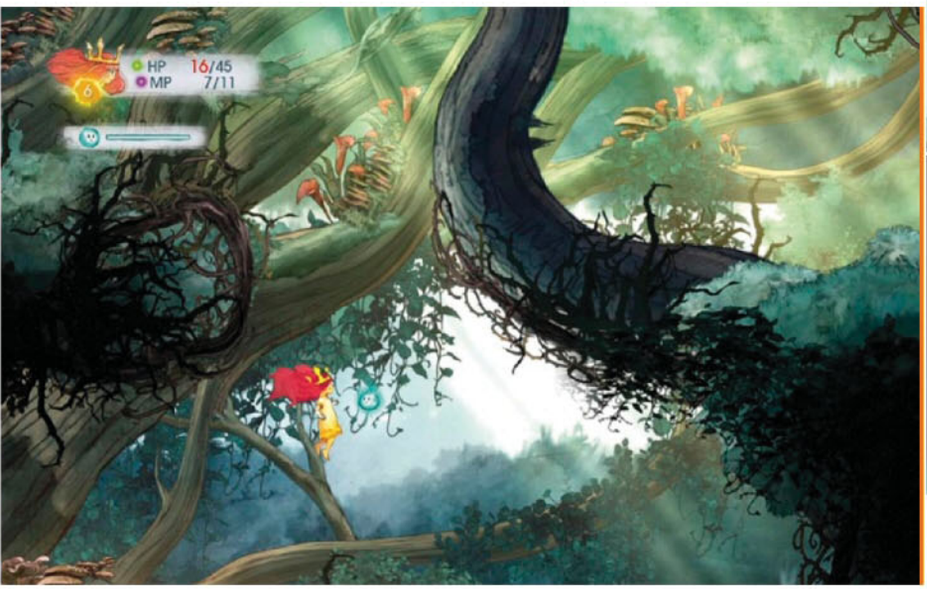
1. Here are your party's stats, with health and mana pools that can be replenished with potions.
2. Igniculus has his own resource bar, which is used when he heals or slows an enemy.
3. When it comes time to cast the combat pauses and you can choose from various abilities, all of which take varying lengths of time to deploy.
4. The wait section of this bar is the time it takes between characters attacking.
5. The cast section is where interrupting can occur, and characters move through it at different speeds depending on the cast time of spells or other stats.
6. Igniculus is currently slowing down this minion, which is good for timing interrupt attacks against it.

Igniculus is your constant companion, controllable with mouse or right thumbstick and useful in many ways.

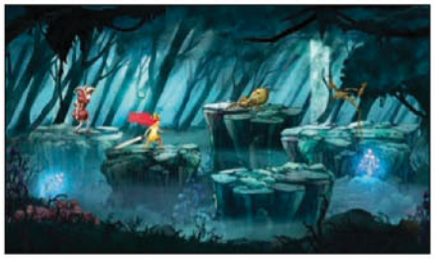
The lush environments vary greatly as Aurora flies around Lumeria. In this case thorns on trees spell bad news if you collide with them.



Finn is one of the people you encounter on your journey who will join your party once you complete a task for him.



ALL IN THE TIMING



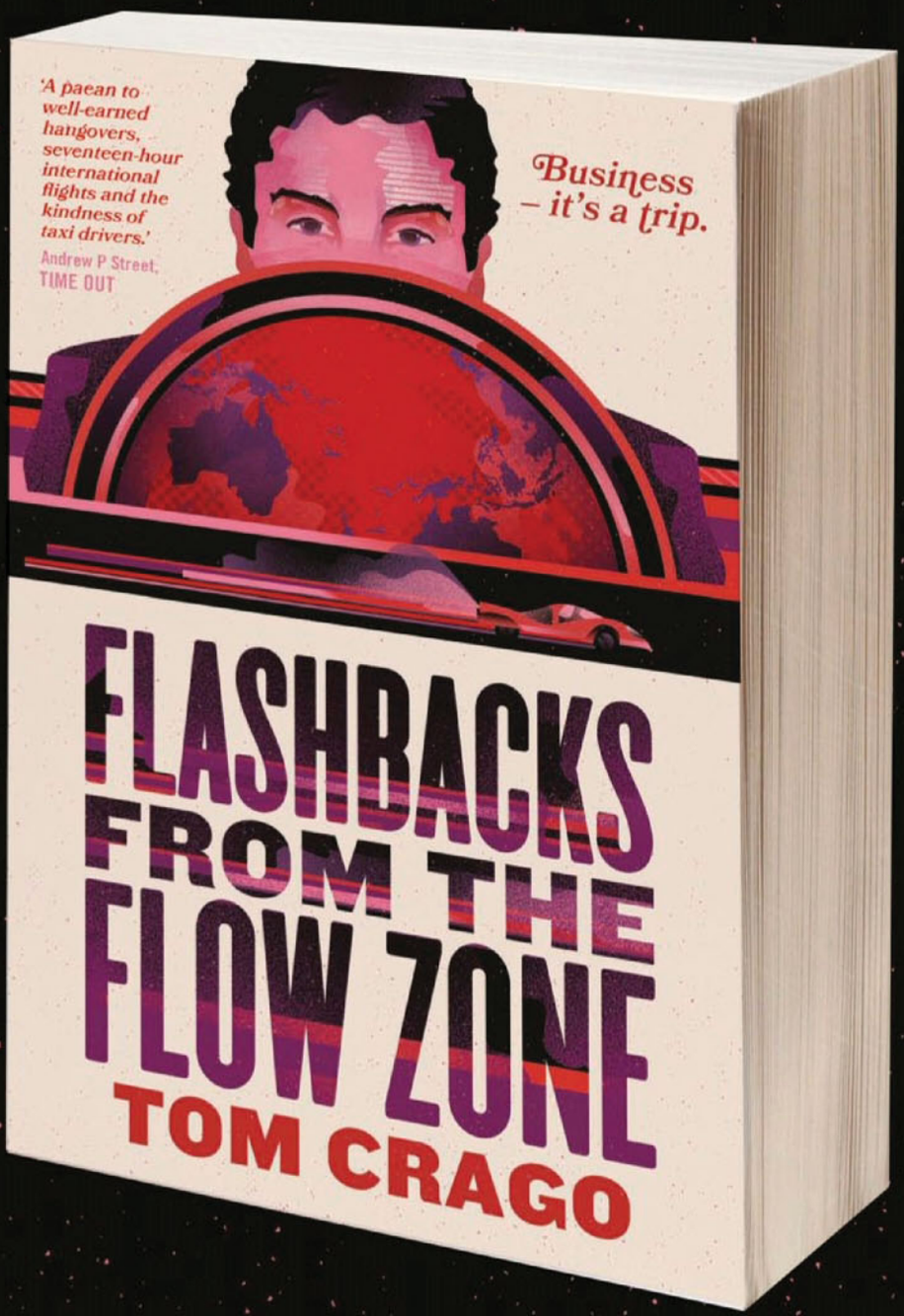
1. A typical combat scenario begins, with your party facing off against two enemies.

2. As the bars at the base of the screen moves, we first tell Aurora to block, an instant move that cant be interrupted.

3. After surviving the first attack, we then hit with a weapon strike, which catches one of the minions mid cast and interrupts him.

WorldMags.net

WELL-EARNED HANGOVERS
17-HOUR INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS
A LOVE LETTER TO THE BUSINESS TRIP


'A paean to well-earned hangovers, seventeen-hour international flights and the kindness of taxi drivers.'
Andrew P Street, TIME OUT
Business – it's a trip.
FLASHBACKS FROM THE FLOW ZONE
TOM CRAGO

Playing Hard at the Video Game

hardie grant books

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

Card Hunter: Attack of the Artifacts

Everyone wants to use equipment that thinks and acts for itself, right? (Right?)

DEVELOPER Blue Manchu
PUBLISHER Blue Manchu
PRICE Items, cards and 1 adventure are free. 5 further adventures are $15. Optional microtransactions are additional.
AVAILABLE AT Now
www.cardhunter.com

Attack of the Artifacts adds another layer of strategy to CardHunter, where you need to keep more of an eye on what you hold than ever before.

I begin this review having lost the penultimate map; Totem Maze, three times in a row. Well, I've actually lost it more than twenty times altogether. The last three are noteworthy because I knocked the enemy out of the victory squares with exactly one star's grace and then made some fatal, but nonetheless educational, error. When I first saw this map it honestly seemed impossible.

Attack of the Artifacts is, quite simply, hard. Having already finished browser-based Card Hunter by Blue Manchu, I wondered what more the game could teach me. With six new campaigns, three at level six and three at level eighteen, and 210 new items, rather a lot, really. Still, arrogance is meant to be punished. In fact, much of the new content focuses around "punishment," or amplifying damage based on how many cards remain in the target's hand.

So, if you have Punishing Strike, use it quickly for 14 damage or late for 3. Or, if the enemy has Punishing Beam, hide until you have a single card in your hand. The turn-based structure to strategy remains but the new cards embellish the player's range of possible approaches significantly and make for unpredictable games. For example, Instant Burn not only causes enduring fire damage itself but also triggers all existing attached fire damage cards.

"Much of the new content focuses around "punishment" ,or amplifying damage based upon how many cards remain in the target's hand"

Scenarios are varied, encompassing tough bosses, overwhelming minions and clever mazes. One map has an island you can't reach without flight or long range weapons. Occasionally, units can kill your characters in one shot, if you badly position them. The AI performs really well, too. I even saw enemies mildly damaging their regenerating allies for five healing points.

The story's tongue in cheek humour persists, with Melvin lording over proceedings, probably cheating. If new enemies seem even more fantastic, expect a quip from Gary, like, "Sharkbears live on land but sleep with their head underwater at night. Wizards have a lot to answer for." The artifacts themselves you both play against and win. They're, shall we say, temperamental.

In addition to the new content, Blue Manchu intend to run multiplayer tournaments. You'll pay in gold or pizza to enter and then the winner, after the time has expired, gets a prize. Leagues will be fixed deck and constructed, with a range of maps to mix up play. We were also told that challenges like "elf only" might further add to the variety of the experience.

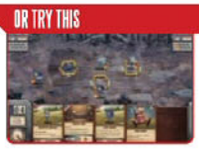
Finally, I saved a few words to tell you that I've now bested Totem Maze. You knew I would, right? It took seven more attempts, but it's done. I had a peek at the final map and I promise it'll be thoroughly beaten by the time you read this. Simply, Attack of the Artifacts penultimate map exemplifies the immensely satisfying journey from, "no way," through, "why do I keep making such ridiculous mistakes," to, "I've mastered it."

MEGHANN O'NEILL PC

WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You can appreciate a good butt kicking, or paddling, as it were.
- If an enemy has one hate-based card, they must then all be hate-based.
- Elves should always have names like, "Dhongaldorlias."
- "Force cannon: oh, it looks like you were just leaving," makes you smile.

OR TRY THIS



IRONCLAD TACTICS
ZACHTRONICS • 2013
+ More civil war and robots.
– Less Melvin.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING – DOTP 2014
STAINLESS GAMES • 2014
+ Established, balanced systems.
– Less moving on the gameboard.

MIGHT AND MAGIC, HEROES VI
UBISOFT • 2011
+ Complex turn-based combat.
– No cards.

VERDICT A challenging expansion that is both more of the same while opening strategy into riskier and more varied territory.

8

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

AUSTRALIA'S #1 GAMES MAG

PC PowerPlay

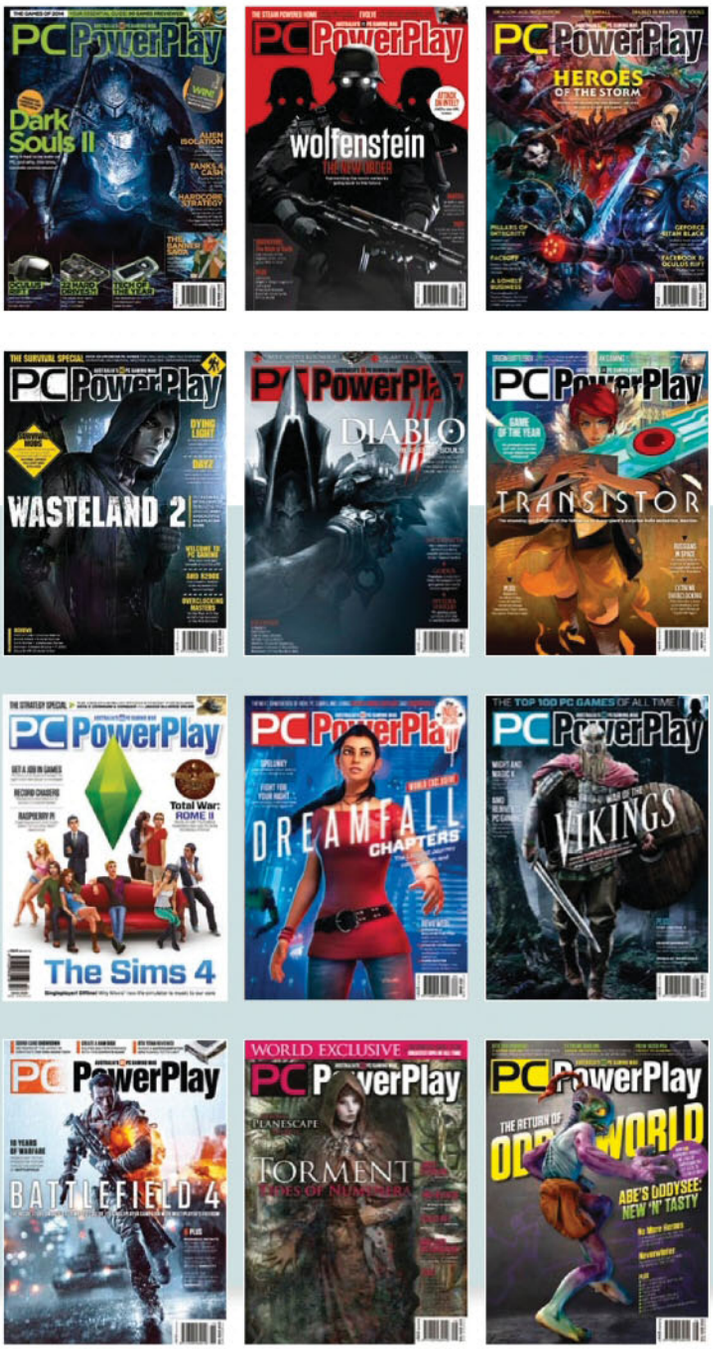
SUBSCRIBE AND WIN!

SAVE MONEY AND RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY PC POWERPLAY T-SHIRT

Subscribe now to receive the ultimate in geek fashion: the PCPP t-shirt - featuring our very own mascot, The Beast himself, Theo!

Not only do subscribers save money on the cover price and have the mag delivered to their door, they now don't even have to buy their own clothes. Brilliant!

WorldMags.net



WHY SUBSCRIBE TO PC PowerPlay?

HUGE SAVINGS on cover price
FREE delivery to your door
NEVER miss an issue!
***BONUS t-shirt**

mymagazines.com.au

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE!

Please photocopy the form if you don't want to ruin your awesome mag

ONLINE: mymagazines.com.au

OR CALL US:
1300 36 11 46
or +612 9901 6111 (overseas)

POST TO:
PCPP SUBSCRIPTIONS
LOCKED BAG 3355,
ST LEONARDS NSW 1590

YES! I'LL SUBSCRIBE TO PC PowerPlay

Me Gift (Please tick one)
☐ ☐ **26 DISC issues** (2 years) at $199.00 + bonus t-shirt
☐ ☐ **13 DISC issues** (1 year) at $129.00 + bonus t-shirt

Me Gift (Please tick one)
☐ ☐ **26 DISCLESS issues** (2 years) at $169.00 + bonus t-shirt
☐ ☐ **13 DISCLESS issues** (1 year) at $109.00 + bonus t-shirt

S M L (Select your T-Shirt size)
☐ ☐ ☐ Preferred t-shirt size (Australia & New Zealand Only)
(S: 49cm chest, 72cm length. M: 52cm chest, 75cm length. L: 55cm chest, 78cm length.)

Enclosed is a cheque/money order for A$_____
made payable to nextmedia Pty Ltd OR please charge my credit card:

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express

☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Name on card:_____ Expiry Date:_____/_____

Signature:_____

My Details:

Full Name: _____

Address:_____

_____State:_____Postcode:_____

Daytime Telephone: ( )_____

E-mail Address:_____

Please provide phone or email in case of delivery issues

Please Send this Gift Subscription to:

Full Name: _____

Address:_____

_____State:_____Postcode:_____

Daytime Telephone: ( )_____

E-mail Address:_____

*T-shirt offer available to Australian and New Zealand residents only. Expires 18/6/14. Prices include GST. Savings based on total cover price. Overseas Airmail 13 Disc issues A$189. Please allow 6-8 weeks for separate delivery of your free T-Shirt. A PC PowerPlay subscription comprises of 12 issues of PC Powerplay and 1 special issue per year. This form may be used as a tax invoice. nextmedia Pty Ltd ABN 84128 805 970. Please tick if you do not wish to receive special offers or information from nextmedia or its partners via ☐ mail ☐ email. Refer to www.nextmedia.com.au for the full Privacy Notice.

MA/PC228

WorldMags.net

ASUS B85-PRO Gamer

All the performance at a fraction of the cost.

At the heart of any quality gaming PC is the motherboard. It's the largest component inside the case, and serve as the very backbone of the gaming machine. Without a quality motherboard, the other components will suffer from stability and performance issues, meaning most budget motherboards aren't ready to for the rigours of high-performance gaming. Dedicated gaming motherboards tend to be very expensive; not only do they include the best components for stability and performance, but they're packed with extra features that gamers demand. ASUS has created a product that delivers the necessary performance and extras that gamers need, yet with a price that makes it much more affordable than other gaming motherboards. Welcome to the B85-PRO GAMER, a $149 Socket 1150 motherboard with features that would normally cost twice the price.

> **The B85 performs identically in games to the more expensive Z87 based motherboards**

WHO NEEDS THE Z87?

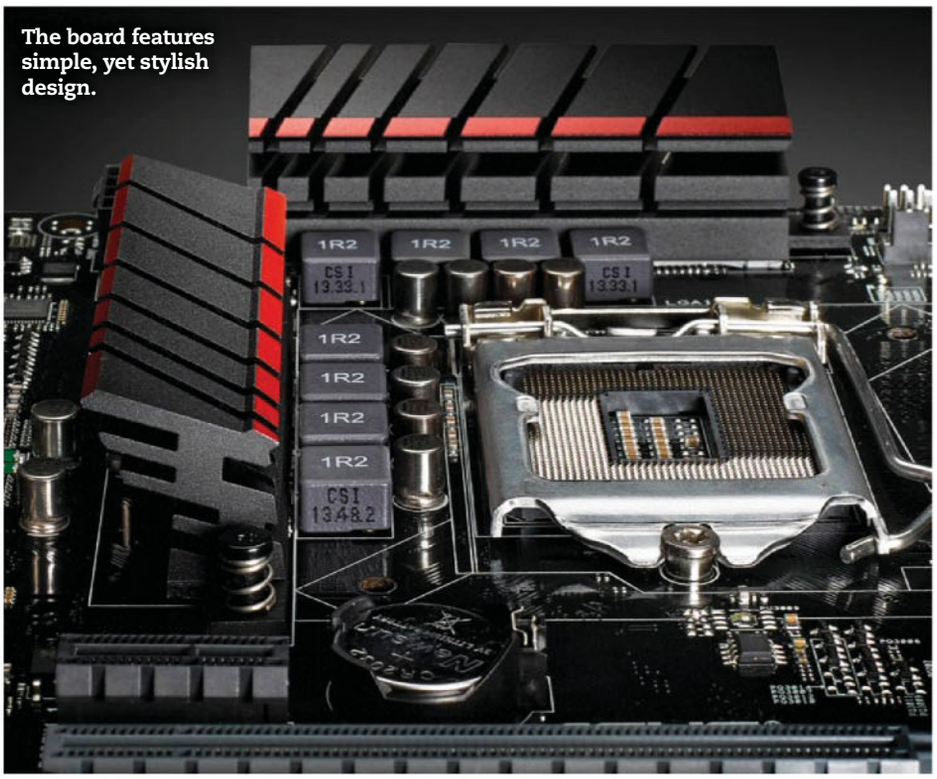
Most gaming motherboards use Intel's most expensive motherboard chipset, the Z87. Clever marketing has made gamers believe that this is the only chipset to offer unbeatable game performance, but the truth isn't quite so clear. ASUS has instead used the B85 chipset to build the B85-PRO Gamer, which was originally intended for business users. As a result, it's very reliable, as businesses demand components that do not fail. Unlike the Z87, the B85 chipset does not include iSIPP or vPro features, both expensive features which are useless to gamers. The only major difference gamers will notice is that the B85 has four SATA 6GB/sec port instead of the Z87's six. Most gamers struggle to fill just four SATA 6GB/sec slots, so again it's not an issue. ASUS has also included another two SATA 3.0GB/sec ports, for slower devices like optical drives.

Most importantly, when it comes to game performance, the B85 performs identically to the Z87-based motherboards, provided they use the same memory speed. The B85-PRO Gamer supports DDR3-1600MHz, which is by far the most popular speed currently used by gamers. Why pay for a motherboard that uses expensive memory components to enable DDR3-2100MHz speed when you're never going to use it? When using DDR3-1600MHz memory, the B85-PRO Gamer's will be identical to Z87 motherboards at twice the price, whether you're playing graphically intensive shooters like Battlefield 4 or less demanding games like League of Legends.

The board is also equipped with top quality Duel Intelligent Processor 2 with DIGI+ VRM to ensure the CPU is always receiving the cleanest, most stable power supply. Combined with the finest 10K Nichicon-GT capacitors and enhanced DRAM overcurrent protection, known as Gamers Guaridan, and the B85-PRO Gamer is a board that is designed to last for many years to come.

The B85 chipset does not support NVIDIA's SLI multi-GPU technology, yet this is a feature aimed at gamers with a high budget for GPUs, unlike the mainstream gamers craving the B85-PRO Gamer. However, AMD's CrossFire multi-GPU solution works perfectly on the B85-PRO Gamer, so the option for multiple graphics cards is there if owners decide they wish to follow that path.

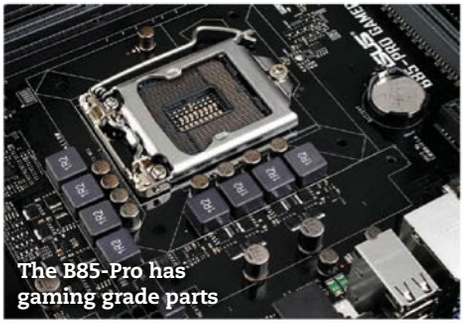
ASUS®
IN SEARCH OF INCREDIBLE
PLAY BETTER.
WITH B85-PRO GAMER.
WorldMags.net


The board features simple, yet stylish design.

SUPERIOR AUDIO

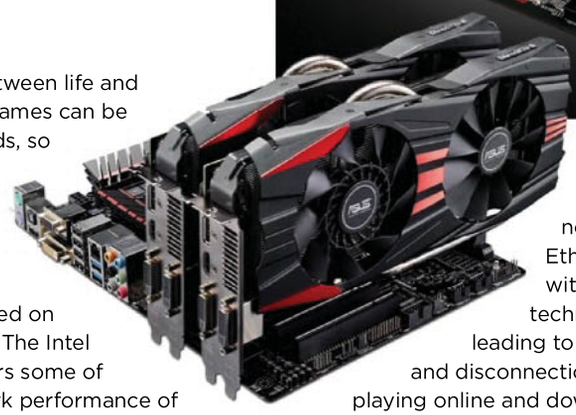
By saving money on the chipset used, ASUS has been able to stock the B85-PRO Gamer with features that are usually only found on $300 motherboards. The first of this is the gamer-grade audio, in the form of the SupremeFX audio system. At the heart of this high quality audio system is a SupremeFX 8-channel HD Audio codec, with the amazingly clear 115 dB SNR during stereo playback. This is due to the Electromagnetic Frequency cover and red-line shielding that isolates the audio chip from the electrical noise of the motherboard. High quality ELNA audio capacitors combine with a 300 ohm headphone amplifier to deliver crystal clear audio over headphones, a rarity in this price range. This sound system really needs to be heard to be believed, as it's vastly superior to the cheap, inferior onboard sound system found on most mainstream motherboards. The fantastic sound quality isn't limited to what the gamer hears; SupremeFX also enhances VOIP, using digital signal processing to remove noise between spoken words, making it easier for your friend to hear you in the heat of battle.

Superior Audio is delivered by SupremeFX


The B85-Pro has gaming grade parts

LESS LATENCY

The difference between life and death in today's games can be mere microseconds, so ASUS' engineers have paid special attention to the Intel Gigabit Ethernet port that is included on the motherboard. The Intel LAN 1217-V delivers some of the fastest network performance of all network controllers, and ASUS has combined this with proprietary software that ensures your gaming packets receive priority. It doesn't matter if you're streaming YouTube or downloading large files, the GameFirst II software always puts your gaming packets first. Tests show that the ping time can be up to 800% faster when GameFirst II is enabled while the PC is downloading other files. Most other gaming motherboards at this price use inferior non-Intel Ethernet ports without this technology, leading to stuttering and disconnections while playing online and downloading, an often occurrence in homes with more than one PC.



THE BEST BIOS

Gone are the bad old days of scary BIOS screens filled with technobabble and controllable only by keyboard. The B85-PRO Gamer is loaded with the very latest software to enable easy setup and troubleshooting. AI Suite 3 gives access to most controls such as fan speeds and USB 3.0 boosting via the Windows-based interface, but those who like to get down and dirty with the actual BIOS will love the moust-controllabel UEFI BIOS, which makes setting up your PC easier than ever before. Updating the BIOS can be done just by plugging in a USB stick with the updated firmware, while CrashFree BIOS 3 ensures the B85-PRO Gamer will always boot, no matter what.

THERE IS NO OTHER OPTION

At just $149, the B85-PRO Gamer offers outstanding value for money for mainstream PC gamers. Packed to the brim with features that will bring your games to life, as well as the very fastest performance, there is no better gaming motherboard at this price.

SupremeFX & Sonic Radar delivering flawless audio

Intel LAN & GameFirst II no lag, win more.

Exceptionally Durable components and reliable design

WorldMags.net

JOIN US facebook.com/asusaustralia • www.asus.com.au

msi®

MSI recommends Windows 8.

Some apps sold separately; vary by market.

All-in-One, One for All

As the Crystal, Beautiful and Firm.

10 Point Touch | MILITARY CLASS II | FHD LED Panel | USB 3.0 | Super Charger | THX TruStudio PRO

Wind Top AE2712 Series

Windows 8, Intel® Core™ i7-3770s,
27"1920x1080 Full HD LED Backlight, 2TB 3.5"SATA II HDD

Work easy. Play hard. Windows 8

au.msi.com

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

In Yo' Face

Sadly I didn't get to read John's intro last month until it arrived in my letterbox along with the rest of you, so didn't spend my intro on the other side of his discussion about Facebook acquiring Rift. Now is the time to right that wrong.

I totally understand John's fear of Facebook finding yet another, even more intrusive way of data-mining our sad and pathetic lives, yet I'm optimistic about Rift being swallowed whole by the Face-huggers. For starters, none of the legendary names working at Oculus have walked; since I assume they're both a) much smarter than I am and b) know much more about the deal than I do, I can only assume that they're not concerned about the sudden injection of several billion in R&D funds. That, or they're all driving new Ferrari Californias to work; naught to 100mph in 4.7 seconds is a quick way to destroy morals.

It's all the cash money behind Facebook that makes me feel warm and glowey about the Facebook/Oculus buyout. Sure, Oculus had a cool US$100 mill behind it already, but for the Rift to live up to the incredibly high expectations as the saviour after 30 years of VR being a joke, it's going to need one kick-ass screen to deliver the goods. US$100 million would probably cover the design costs of the screws used to fit a custom-made screen to the Rift ski-goggles, but now oculus can commission a big-name screen builder to craft something specifically for VR. No screen like this is currently being built on a mass scale.

If having a clear, totally immersive VR experience means I need to press a log-in button each time I use the device, and I'm then served tailored adverts, I'm not too sure that I care. For me it's VR quality first, everything else second. Time will tell in the end – but this cash injection can only be a good thing.

Bennett Ring
Tech Editor
bring@next.com.au

PCPP TESTBENCH

CPU
INTEL I7 3770K
www.intel.com.au

MOBO
GIGABYTE Z77X-UD3H
www.gigabyte.com.au

SSD
CORSAIR NEUTRON
www.corsair.com

RAM
8GB PATRIOT DDR3 2,133MHz
www.patriotmemory.com

GPU
RADEON HD 7970
www.amd.com

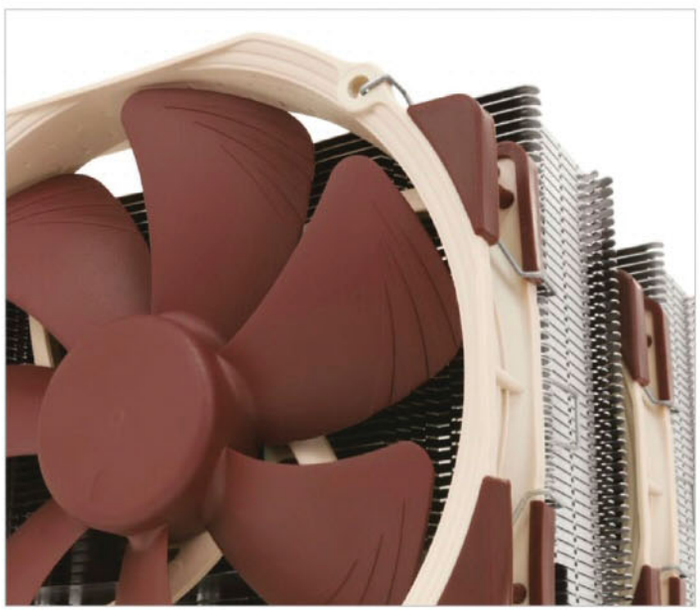
PSU
CORSAIR AX860I
www.corsair.com

DISPLAY
DELL U2711
www.dell.com.au

Our Power Award is given to products that are best in class no matter your budget.

Our Smart Buy Award goes to products that balance performance with price tag.

70 Radeon HD 295x2
74 Hotware
76 My PC
78 MSI GTX 750 Ti OC Edition.
78 Palit Storm GTX 750 Ti
79 Noctua NH-D15
80 ADATA DDR3 3100
80 Crucial Ballistix Tactical
82 Thecus N2310 NAS
82 FRITZ!Box 8490
84 Fractal Design Node 804
84 Corsair Raptor M40

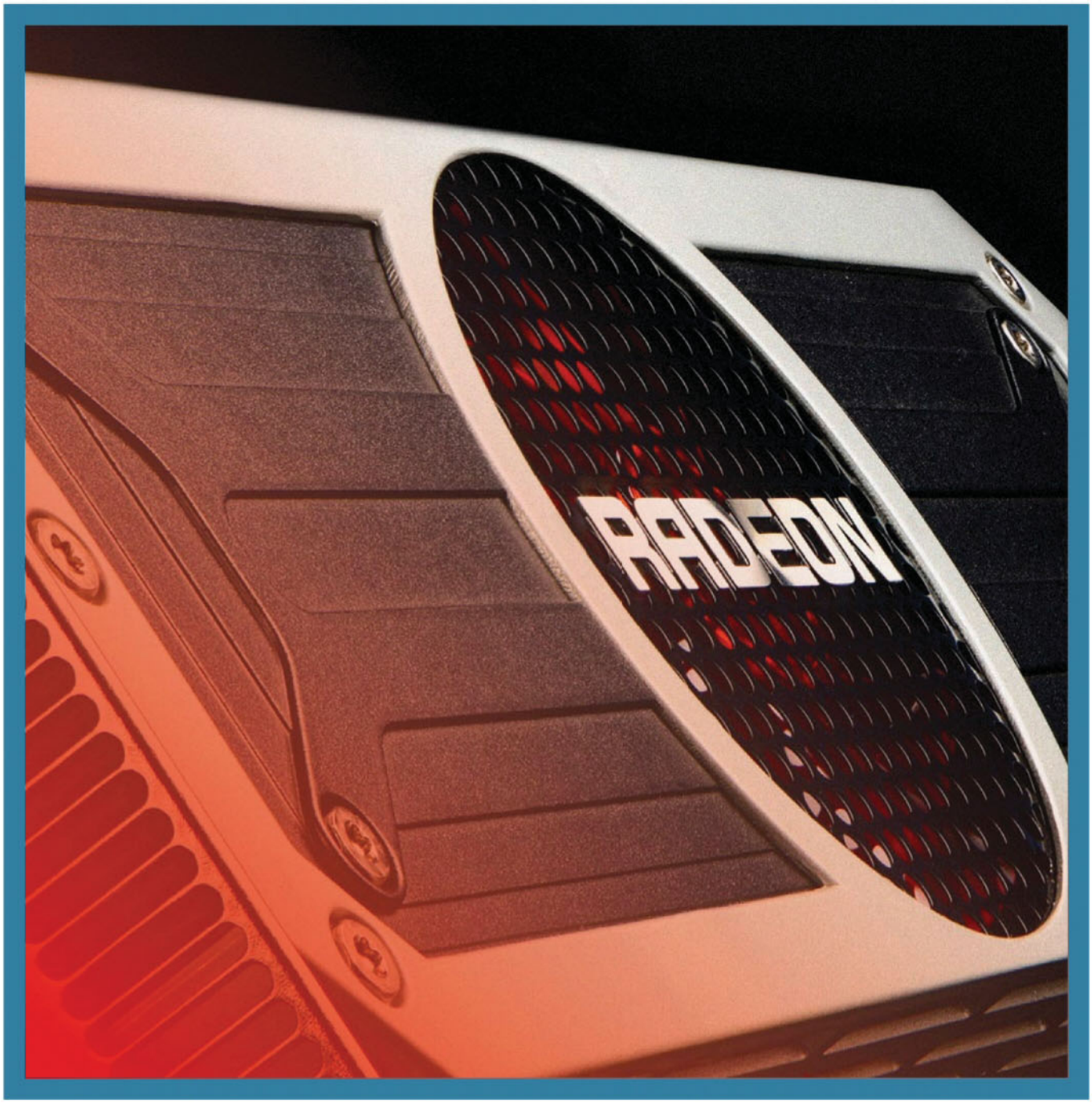


WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

BURN IT TO THE GROUND

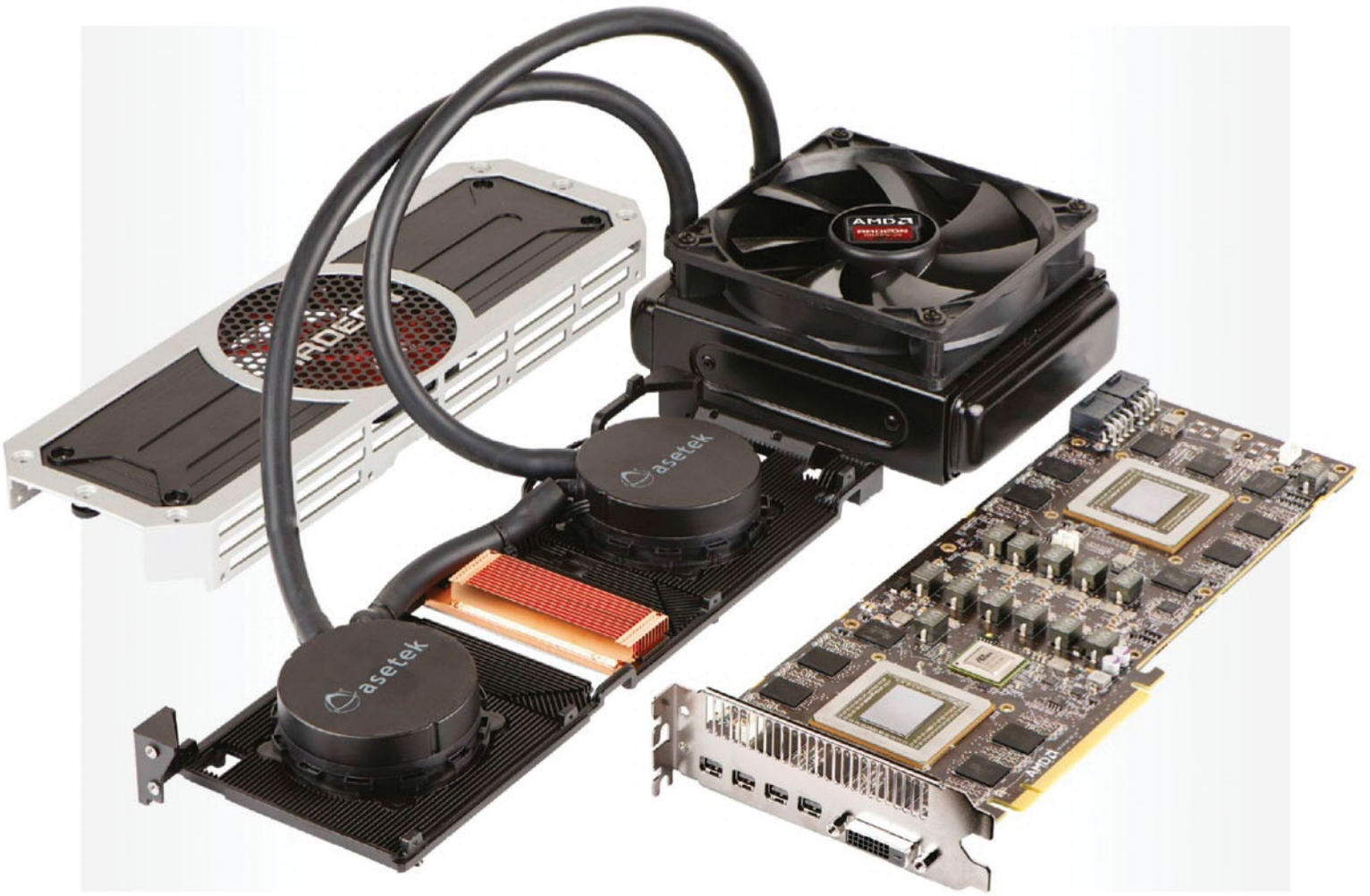
BENNETT RING checks out AMD's most ridiculous graphics card to date.



WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

BURN IT TO THE GROUND



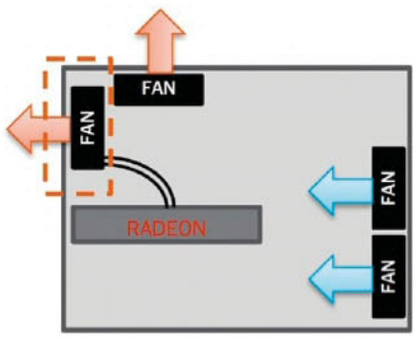
If we only had two words to describe AMD's current single-GPU king, the R9 290X, they'd be fast and hot. So when we heard that AMD had strapped two of these GPUs together inside a single, twin-slot graphics card called the R9 295X2, we wondered whether they'd include a small fire extinguisher in the box. You see, a single R9 290X is quite happy to scorch the inside of your case with an operating temperature of 95C, dangerously close to boiling point, and sending CPU temperatures soaring. Put two of these GPUs right next to each other and you've got a wonderfully expensive way to set fire to your house… unless you're extremely clever about how you're going to cool them. As it so happens, AMD is rather clever indeed.

If you take a look at the photos of the 295X2, you'll notice a few interesting ways that AMD has managed to remove the massive 500W of heat being pumped out by this uber-card. It's surprisingly small for a dual GPU graphics card, managing to fill a twin slot design, taking up just two ports on the rear of your case. There's only one cooling fan mounted in the centre of the graphics card; given the heat concerns this seems like utter insanity. However, the magic black box that solves all AMD's climate warning woes is the large block that hangs off the card, connected via two pipes. This is a closed loop liquid cooler, built by the water cooling pros at Asetek.

WATER WORKS

What you can't see are the Asetek copper coolers, each with an integrated pump, sitting directly on top of each R9 290 GPU, hidden beneath the black exoskeleton. Both of these are connected in a serial configuration, which sends the heated water back to the external 120mm radiator. The radiator uses a single 120mm fan to pull air through its cooling fins, though it's possible to add another fan on the reverse side for even better performance. While the water loop directly tames each R9 290X GPU, the single, centrally mounted fan is attached to a relatively standard heatsink to keep the graphic's cards components nice and cool, such as the power componentry and RAM.

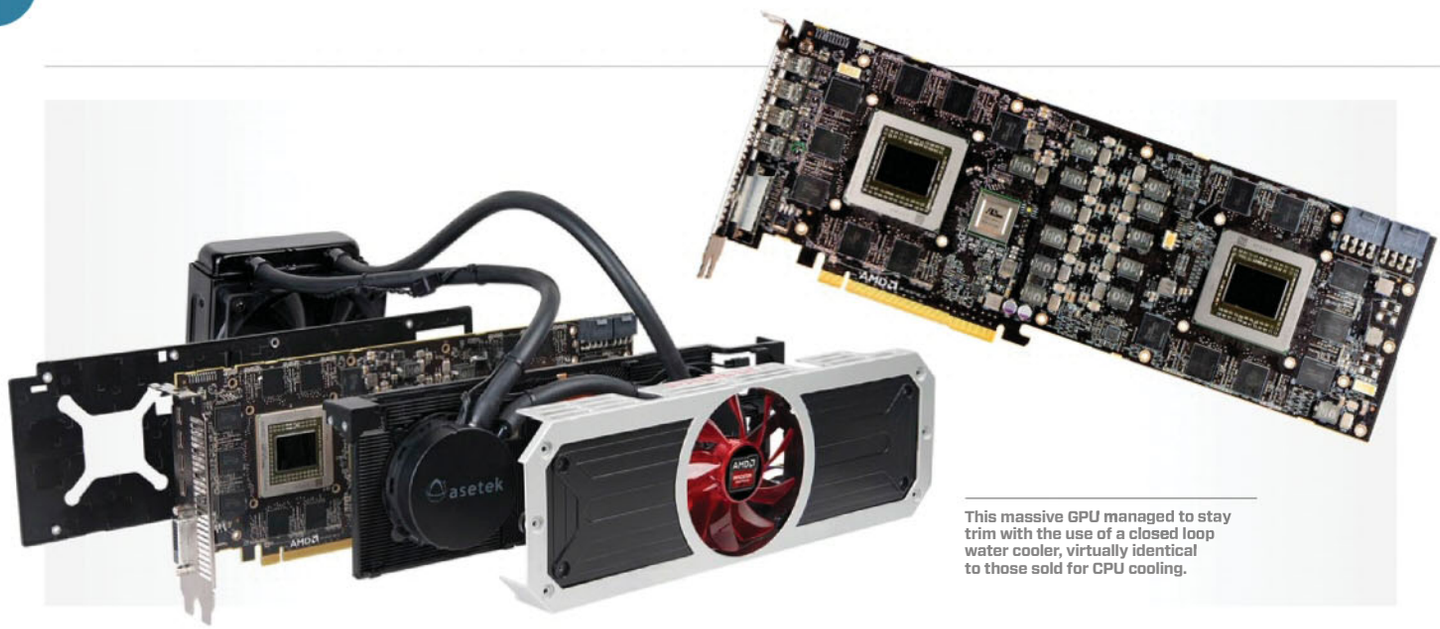
This admirable cooling solution has resulted in one of the coolest graphics cards available, a remarkable feat given the heat usually generated by just one of these GPUs. During our Metro Last Light test, one of the most demanding benchmarks available, we measured a peak temperature of just 73C. That's even better than a single GeForce GTX 780 Ti, one of the most power efficient high-end cards currently available. There is a price to be paid for these low temperatures though; owners are going to need to have a case that can fit both the 12 inch card and the radiator. This illustration from AMD shows the preferred configuration:



We're not sure about you, but in our system builds we usually have a large CPU cooler sitting right where the two cooling pipes reside, so it's going to take some clever cabling to make everything sit in the right place.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net



This massive GPU managed to stay trim with the use of a closed loop water cooler, virtually identical to those sold for CPU cooling.

A POWERFUL PRICE TO PAY

Part of the reason the R9 290X GPUs inside this card usually run so hot is that they use a lot of power while they're doing their thing – 250W to be precise. Unsurprisingly this means the R9 295X2 has rather demanding power requirements, as it burns through 500W of power, the first reference graphics card on the market to hit such high power requirements. Twin 8-pin power plugs are included on the card, and they must be connected to a quality PSU that can deliver 28 Amps to each of these plugs. It must also be capable of supplying a combined 50 Amps over the twin 8-pin plugs. In other words, that 650W Yum Cha PSU you bought for $150 isn't going to cut the mustard. Our Corsair AX1200i handled the job ably, as it should for a $429 power supply, but AMD recommends an 800W PSU as a bare minimum.

As well as being considerably cooler than a standalone R9 290X, it stands to reason that the R9 295X2 should also be much quieter. Less heat means lower fan speeds, and water cooling is known for being basically silent compared to pure air cooling. The 290X is known as a rather rowdy component thanks to its overworked air cooling, but the same can't be said for the R9 295X2. To our amazement, we measured the load volume at just 52dB, making it basically silent once mounted inside a case.

THE SPECS

Now that we've explained how AMD has managed to squeeze two miniature suns onto a relatively normal sized graphics card, let's take a look at the overall specs. Both GPUs are fully fledged Hawaii R9 290 GPUs built with the newer 1.1 version of the Graphics Card Next design, with every piece of silicon enabled. That's a whopping 2816 shaders, 176 Texture Units and 64 ROPs on each GPU. Both GPUs are endowed with a whopping 4GB of memory running at 5GHz over a 512-bit bus, giving the card a total of 8GB of memory. Only those of you with 4K displays will likely see the benefit of such a huge slab of memory, despite what the marketeers might have you believe. In most dual-GPU cards, each GPU's frequency has to be dropped slightly due to heat concerns; thanks to the water cooling used here, AMD has actually increased the frequency, though only by a mere 18MHz, up to 1018MHz under load. The output configuration is rather unique – alongside a single DL-DVI-D output are four mini-DisplayPort connectors.

Like all R9 products, the 295X2 is compatible with AMD's proprietary API, Mantle, though after Microsoft's recent DX12 announcements and NVIDIA's "wonder" 337.5 drivers, we're even less confident than ever that it'll take off. It also includes the TrueAudio dedicated audio processor, lowering the CPU load when calculating effects such as reverb and occlusion. The TrueAudio standard is currently supported by just one game, Thief. Finally, AMD's Eyefinitiy multiple monitor support is included, enabling up to five HD screens off the one card.

> "We've explained how AMD has managed to squeeze two minature suns into a relatively normal sized graphics card"

THE PACING ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

If you've been reading PCPP for the last year or so, you'd remember one issue in particular that might be scaring you away from the twin GPUs of the R9 295X2. We've been recommending gamers stay away from multi-GPU solutions from AMD ever since the issue of frame pacing became a public embarrassment for AMD; basically speaking, multi-GPU setups from AMD were spitting out frames inconsistently. The benchmark numbers looked great, but the gameplay experience was less than optimal, with heavy stuttering and uneven performance. It took the release of tools from NVIDIA to illustrate how serious the problem was before AMD admitted the problem. Over the last six months the company has spent serious software development time trying to fix the issue, and the XDMA block of the GCN 1.1 design basically solves it entirely. Rather than NVIDIA's solution of a dedicated hardware bridge between each GPU, AMD uses the PCI Express bus to handle the frame sharing, which is why the R9 295X2 has its own dedicated PCIe bridge chip. We're happy to report that we didn't notice any strange stuttering when using the R9 295X2, suggesting that frame pacing won't be a problem for this product.

CAN IT 4K?

With so much GPU horsepower on tap, it's no wonder that AMD is pushing this as a card capable of true 4K gaming, delivering playable performance at the unbelievable resolution of 3840 x 2160. We've heard similar claims in the past, and found them to be untrue, even when using twin R9 290s or twin GeForce GTX 780s.

Therefore we had no choice but to benchmark this behemoth at 4K to see if there finally existed a product that could handle this new uber-resolution. Thanks to the wonderful folks at ASUS, we soon had our mitts on their PQ321 display, one of the very few 4K PC displays on the market. As soon as we fired up our usual benchmarks, to our surprise the R9 295X2 bested the rest, especially noteworthy being the results over twin R9 290X GPUs.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

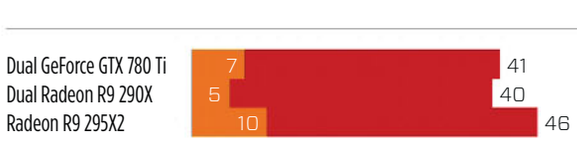
RADEON R9 295X2 GAMING BENCHMARKS

Hitman Absolution - Max Details with 4xAA

Hitman Absolution - Max Details with No AA

Metro 2033 - Max Detail

Metro 2033 - Max Detail, with no SSAA



Battlefield 3 - Max Details

Battlefield 3 - Max Details with no MSAA

Tomb Raider - Max Details

Fan Noise

The reason it manages to outdo these solo cards is the use of water cooling; the R9 290X is generally thermally limited in the most demanding situations, so the GPU has to slow down a little to stop it bursting into flames. However, the high powered water cooling of the R9 295X2 means it need never drop below peak speed, managing to out do everything else. Even better, it does so while remaining barely audible, which is simply crazy.

While it did struggle with the outlandishly demanding Metro 2033 benchmark, the R9 295X2 hit the sweet spot of 60fps in nearly all of our other 4K tests. Yes, we finally have a card that can do 60fps at 4K. There is a caveat though – we don't think it'll maintain 60fps when the shit hits the fan, like when a carrier in BF4 is about to go down, or when an especially elaborate assassination involving lots of bombs goes off in Hitman. However, we have absolutely no doubt that this card can handle 2560 x 1440 and lower resolutions with everything set to Ultra considering it does so well at 4K.

Obviously a card of these specifications isn't going to be cheap, and at $1999 the R9 295X2 is aimed at only the most enthusiastic of PC gamers. Considering you can buy two R9 290X cards for $800 cheaper, or twin 780 Tis for $400 less, it's obvious that the R9-295X isn't aimed at the value for money segment. However, for those with the money to spare, the ability to fit such a powerful solution into a small space, all while remaining whisper quiet, could make the R9 295X2 the only card for the job. We have to take our hats off to AMD for pulling off this engineering miracle; not only did they fix the heat issues of the singular R9 290X, they also managed to pull frame pacing back into line, merging it all into a powerhouse that takes up the space of a regular graphics card. We can only imagine how much NVIDIA would charge for a similarly performing product… PC

WorldMags.net

HOTWARE

WITH TERRENCE JARRAD

1. Smart Contact Lens

Price: $TBA • Distributor: Google, one day
www.google.com

Glass is not even on the market yet, and Google is already trying to find ways to one-up the project. As technology often goes, this next iteration is more compact; a smart contact lens.

POWERED UP: It's not a directionless project. The aim for now is to assist those suffering from diabetes by reading the wearer's glucose levels through tear fluid, once a second, and either transmit this info wirelessly, or light up a tiny inbuilt LED if reaching a warning state.

PLAYED OUT: LEDs in your eyes, under your eyelids. That's what you want.

2. TomTom Runner Cardio

Price: $300 • Distributor: TomTom
www.tomtom.com

Studies are showing that those whose jobs involve sitting around all day (i.e. pretty much everyone in an office) have a higher risk of developing a range of health issues. Ergo, you owe it to yourself to get off your backside and do some exercise.

POWERED UP: Five training intensity zones, "highly accurate" built in heart rate monitor, large full screen display to easily keep track of critical information when you're on the move.

PLAYED OUT: You can get free phone apps that do a lot of this stuff, just drop $10 on an armband for it.

3. Amazon Fire TV

Price: $150 • Distributor: Amazon
www.amazon.com

It seems like the next logical step really. First e-Readers, then internet enabled tablets, and now, media player and gaming device. A set top box for the digital age, the Fire TV competes with its Apple, Google, and Roku equivalents.

POWERED UP: It also plays games (mostly ported mobile affairs), with a bespoke controller. Powered by a quad core 1.7GHz processor, 2GB RAM, and 8GB internal storage, it's a plug and play streaming device that accepts voice commands, plays Dolby Digital Plus surround sound and even has optical audio out.

PLAYED OUT: Not shipping to Australia currently, so you'll need to make use of a sneaky postal routing service if you simply MUST have it.

4. The Soft Goat

Price: $20 • Distributor: The Soft Goat/Soften Her
thesoftgoat.com/softenher.com

You know the problem well. Your guy has just trimmed his beard, or perhaps is going for a scruffy-rogue look, or, heaven forbid, that ever so trendy designer stubble. It looks fine, but every time his face touches yours, it's like being stabbed with a thousand tiny needles, and now you have beard rash. Well, no longer!

POWERED UP: The Soft Goat is a hypoallergenic pad that smooths stubble, keeping the look while losing the laceration.

PLAYED OUT: Soften Her is the women's version. You can tell because it's pink.

5. Tubecore Duo

Price: $500+ • Distributor: Tubecore
tubecore.co

An unholy fusion of various parts of retro and modern technologies, the Tubecore Duo combines vacuum tubes and Raspberry Pi, like some kind of media-playing manticore.

POWERED UP: Class A tube pre-amp. The Model B Raspberry Pi. It allows inputs from Bluetooth, WiFi, HDMI and AV, as well as the more traditional inputs of analogue phono and line level, means the Duo is just as capable of streaming video as audio. It's an open source, (read: hackable), media centre and speaker, sitting within a wood enclosure.

PLAYED OUT: The magnetic speaker cover has too many colours to choose from?

05 04

01

02

03

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

800MHz Dual Core Processor
Extreme Speed & Range

NETGEAR®

MAXIMUM WIFI PERFORMANCE

AC1200 HIGH POWER WIFI RANGE EXTENDER EX6200

POWER UP YOUR NETWORK

The fastest AC WiFi Range Extender available

802.11ac dual band WiFi up to 1200Mbps

Dual core processor for max WiFi performance

700mW amplified high-power design for ultimate range

Works with any standard WiFi router

AC1200 DUAL BAND RANGE

GAMING | STREAMING | MOBILE

netgear.com.au/maxwifi

WorldMags.net

DOUG MCLEAN AGE 29 | KUNUNURRA

This month's MY PC brought to you by CORSAIR™

FOUR MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES:

1. ASUS Radeon HD7950 3GB
2. AMD FX-8350 Black Edition 4.00Ghz
3. Corsair Vengeance K70 Cherry MX Red
4. BitFenix Ghost Silent Tower

LAST UPGRADE: My Vengeance K70, it is my first mechanical keyboard and was kinda a forced upgrade after I... shared a beer with my last keyboard.

DREAM UPGRADE: A new monitor, most likely a BenQ 144hz monitor.

FAVOURITE FEATURE: Probably the Bitfenix case, with all the extra fans and vents it helps to keep it cool in the tropical climate. (Ed - We had to add our favourite feature of Doug's system) Included in the picture is my first ever PCPP purchased Issue 17 from October 1997 and my most recent. the rest of my collection is on the bookshelf.

DOUG WINS!

Doug wins a Corsair M65 mouse and Raptor mousemat, thanks to our friends at Corsair. It isn't the monitor, unfortunately, but it will match that shiny new K70 nicely.

1. Do we spy a joystick? The sign of someone ready for any gaming experience, for those times when a gamepad just isn't enough.
2. Issue 17, one of the true classics, and the sign of a long term PCPPer! As Ben Mansill, the Editor from abck then just exclaimed, good one Doug!
3. We wonder whether the Borderlands loot chest only spawns blue relics and rubber grenades like the ones ingame.
4. That is one very well used old school Logitech mouse. One of the classics, but time for an upgrade methinks.
5. The team was debating, and we think Doug just might be a Batman fan.

WANT FREE STUFF?

Send your MyPC entry today to *mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au*. Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!

WorldMags.net

WHY DO THE CIA AND FBI USE

ORIGIN

WE CAN'T TELL YOU, THAT INFORMATION IS

BUT WE CAN TELL YOU WHY NASA, THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY AND SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY CHOOSE ORIGIN. IT'S SIMPLE. WE MAKE THE HIGHEST PERFORMING DESKTOP AND LAPTOP COMPUTERS IN THE WORLD.

ORIGIN | WWW.ORIGINPC.COM.AU | 1300 904 021

PCWorld 4.5 out of 5 Stars | PC WORLD Best BUY | PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★ | SEAL OF attack OF THE SHOW APPROVAL | MAXIMUM PC KICK ASS! | EDITORS' CHOICE MAR 12 cnet | gameinformer editor's choice

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

GTX 750 TI HEAD TO HEAD

NVIDIA's new GTX 750 Ti GPU is based on the brand-new Maxwell architecture set to roll out across its 2014 product range, making it a nice preview of what's to come. As expected, every man and his GPU-eating dog has released a version of this entry level product, so we've put two identically priced biters into the ring to see who comes out top dog.

GPU

MSI Twin Frozr GTX 750 Ti OC Edition

Here's comes another one...

PRICE $199
www.msi.com

- Excellent cooler
- Good Value
- Solid Performance

- Slightly larger
- Not quite as fast when overclocked

The first difference you'll notice between the two cards on this page is that MSI's version of the 750 Ti uses a non-reference PCB design, which is slightly longer than the default version. It sports the usual quality capacitors and chokes that MSI equips on all of its OC products. While both cards are double slot models, the MSI is slightly longer as a result of the larger PCB and bigger cooling solution. MSI's Twin Frozr IV cooler uses the standard twin-fan configuration attached to a large much larger aluminium cooling block, which is in turn using heat pipes to help shuffle temps away from the already chilly CPU.

In practice this makes the MSI the quieter of the two, especially when the new fan control software is used, which sets the fan to OC, Gaming or Stealth mode. Even in gaming mode, the card is barely audible.

As expected, MSI has preoverclocked this card. In OC mode the Core hits 1163MHz, dropping to 1137MHz in Gaming mode and 1085MHz in silent mode. it's not quite up there with the Palit, which has a maximum boost speed of 1281MHz, a considerable increase of 10%. Having said that, we managed to overclock the MSI card to 1340MHz, even faster still, but the Palit one-upped it to hit a maximum overclocked speed of 1390MHz.

While the Palit is faster out of the box, MSI offers better cooling and near identical overclocked performance. We're calling this a dead heat.

BENNETT RING PC

VERDICT MSI has released a well-priced variant of the GTX 750 Ti... as has Palit.

8

GPU

Palit Storm Dual GeForce GTX 750 Ti

...just like the other one.

PRICE $199
www.palit.biz

- Best overclocker
- Higher performance
- Slightly smaller

- Slightly louder
- Less granular fan control

Unlike MSI, Palit has endowed its GTX 750 Ti with the reference NVIDIA PCB that is around 30% shorter than the MSI. This would make it a wonderful card for Small Form Factor PCBs, if it wasn't for the fact that Palit then strapped a 50mm piece of metal to the end of the card, for reasons we can't quite fathom. Perhaps it's to support the large slab of aluminium used to cool the GTX 750 Ti GPU, which is in turn cooled by twin 70mm fans. They're considerably smaller than the 90mm fans used on the MSI model, which means they need to spin faster to move as much air. The result is a slightly noisier graphics card, though it's no R9 290X by any stretch of the imagination.

Considering the relatively simple cooling (we couldn't see the use of any heatpipes, instead relying on applying the aluminium cooler directly to the GPU) we were pleasantly surprised by the performance offered by the Palit card. Factory overclocked to a boost speed of 1281MHz, we managed to max it out manually at a whopping 1390MHz. That's a huge 28% performance increase over NVIDIA's default speed for the 750 Ti, suggesting that the new Maxwell architecture has plenty of headroom when it reaches the upper echelons, and beats out the MSI as well.

It might be a tad bit louder than the MSI, but it's also a tad bit faster. Pick whichever one you can find on sale the cheapest and either will make for a fantastic budget card.

BENNETT RING PC

VERDICT Palit has released a well-priced variant of the GTX 750 Ti... as has MSI.

8

WorldMags.net

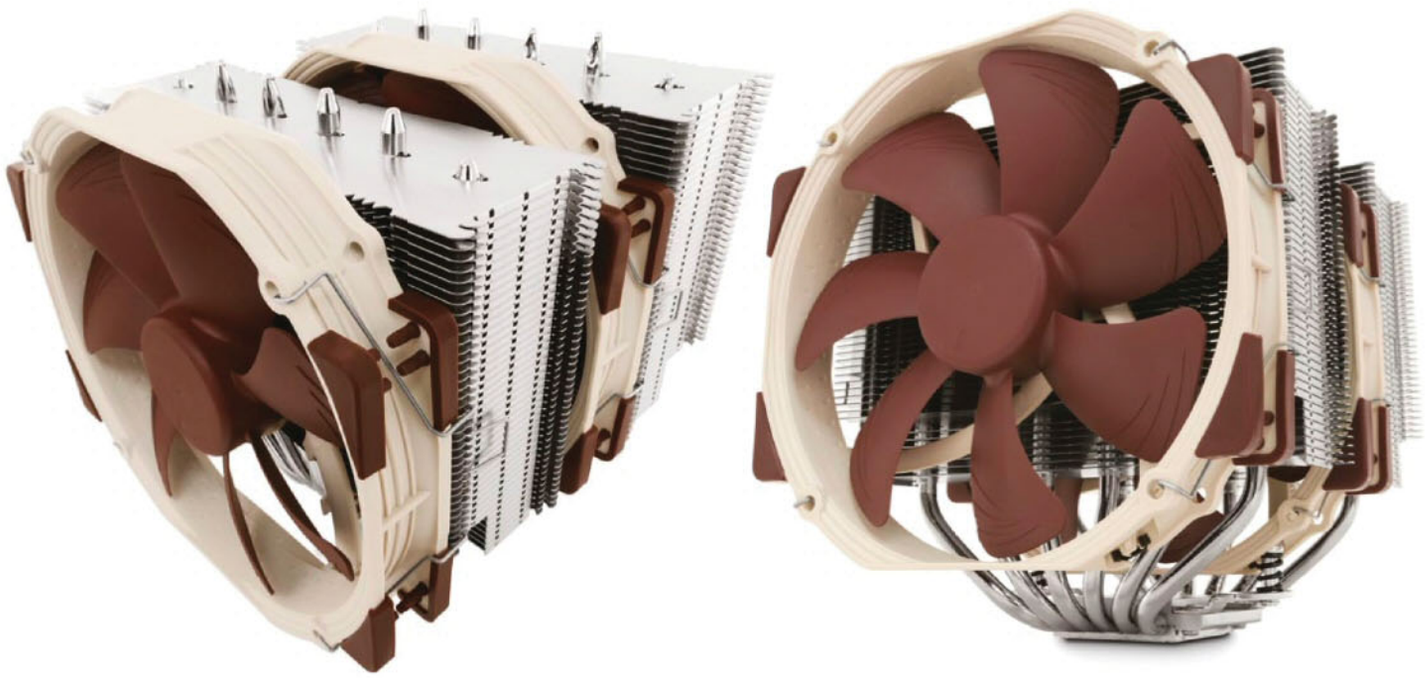
WorldMags.net

COOLERS

Noctua NH-D15

The king is back

PRICE US$99 – AU price TBD
www.noctua.at



It's not often that a CPU cooler graces the pages of PC PowerPlay's tech reviews, let alone get a full page to itself. But the Noctua NH-D15 isn't just any old air-cooler; it's the successor to what is arguably the most popular air cooler ever made for overclockers, the NH-D14. Our tech editor has personally relied upon the D14 to keep his 3770K purring along at 4.5GHz for several years, and he's never heard a peep out of this immense yet silent cooler. That's what made the original D14 so special – it delivered top-tier performance, all while sounding quieter than a sparrow's fart. Can the brand new D15 version live up to the incredible reputation of its predecessor?

Opening the huge box reveals a product that is beautifully packaged. Each of the various components arrive in their own little compartment, including the separate AMD and Intel mounting kits, as well as a large box of accessories. Installing it is a little more complex than most heatsinks, but if you can put together an Ikea bookshelf it shouldn't be an issue. The largest box of all is reserved for the simply gigantic heatsink, which now measures a whopping 150mm high and 150mm wide, 10mm more than its predecessor. This extra size creates more space between each cooling fin, helping to remove heat better than ever. A cooler of this scale is not designed to be squeezed into a Micro-ATX build – only those with full sized ATX cases need apply. It also tips the scales at a 1.3 kilograms with both fans in place, so make sure you use all of the motherboard mounts around the CPU socket to stop any motherboard warping.

A major problem suffered by the D14 was incompatibility with high memory modules; they'd simply smack into the bottom of the fin stack. Noctua has now carved out two areas at the bottom so it'll fit over 64mm high memory sticks, solving the problem entirely. It still uses the twin tower design, with a copper base and heat pipes dragging the heat up to each stack. The default configuration includes a single Noctua NF-A15140mm PWM fan, but to get the most out of the D15 another is included in the box. Adding this makes the cooler around the size of a small child's head, but also makes it possibly the most powerful yet quiet air cooler we've ever tested.

We installed this on an i7 4770K CPU overclocked to 4.4GHz, using the premium thermal paste Noctua includes in the kit. After being under load for 20 minutes in a room with an airconditioned stabile 21C temperature, our CPU measured a peak temperature of 64C, a full 3C improvement over the D14. Yet we could barely hear it doing its thing, thanks to the incredibly silent Noctua fans included in the pack.

So there you have it – once again Noctua proves it's the king of powerful yet silent air cooling. If you've go the room for this behemoth, and don't mind paying a little extra for top tier performance, this is the air cooler to buy. *BENNETT RING* PC

- Amazing performance
- Very quiet
- Fits every CPU socket

- Extremely large
- Very heavy
- Expensive

VERDICT Want to overclock the heck out of your CPU without the hassles of water or excessive fan noise? Look no further.

10 PC POWER AWARD

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

NAS

Thecus N2310 NAS

NAS-tastically priced

PRICE $180
www.thecus.com

If you don't have a Network Attached Storage (NAS) device hooked up to your network, you're doing it wrong. Sure, a sloppy old external USB drive patched into your router or main PC does the job, but using a dedicated NAS is a whole other level of awesome. Unfortunately they're not cheap – well, they weren't this affordable little ripper.

The N2310 couldn't be simpler to set up. After installing your twin hard drives up to a maximum capacity of 8TB (drives are sadly not included in the price), a detailed walkthrough guides you by the hand, automatically finding the device on your network and setting up the basics. The NAS supports Single Disk, JBOD, RAID 0 and 1 configurations; we'd suggest RAID 1 for the ultimate in data safety. Support for DDNS even allows remote access to your files when you're away from home. Once up and running, you can then log into the interface via your web browser of choice, and here you'll see why a NAS is the preferred way to store files.

The 800MHz processor combines with 512MB of DDR3 memory to deliver a very responsive experience, though we did encounter a few crashes. It comes bundled with a bunch of apps, including an FTP server, Torrent client, Plex media server, with dozens more freely downloadable from Thecus. Best of all, it performs extremely quickly for such a device; even with every person in the house streaming HD movies it'll do a fine job.

As one of the most affordable twin-bay NAS devices out there, Thecus has delivered a great product. Even if you didn't know what a NAS was, just know that homes with multiple devices would do well to connect them all to the N2310. *BENNETT RING* PC

- Great performance
- So easy to use
- Affordable

- Fan can get a little noisy
- A few bugs in the UI
- Cheap plastic chassis

VERDICT This is the perfect NAS for those who are finding file management across multiple devices is becoming a pain in the posterior.

9 PC Powerplay SMART BUY

ADSL MODEM ROUTER

FRITZ!Box 7490

Finally, 802.11ac with ADSL!

PRICE $369
www.fritzbox.com.au

Yes, this is easily the oddest looking modem/router we've ever seen, appearing to be styled for an episode of the Jetsons. Don't let the weird 1950's aesthetics scare you off though; if you've been holding out for an ADSL modem that includes the super-fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi protocol, the 7490 finally delivers.

In fact, it's also got a built-in VDSL modem, just in case you're lucky enough to have access to this high speed form of DSL (/glares angrily at John). Gamers won't need the many telephony features though, such as the three phone ports on the back, the built-in answering machine, or the DECT base station that allows it connect to six wireless handsets. These are totally superfluous to most home users, yet undoubtedly contribute to the rather high price tag of the 4390.

Twin USB 3.0 ports allow for file storage or print serving, and it's got the obligatory DLNA media server built-in for those special Game of Thrones nights. And thanks to the speed of 802.11ac, you'll even be able to stream the HD version without stuttering! There are only four Gigabit Ethernet ports, whereas most routers include a fifth for WAN support, which might be an issue for some.

We couldn't reliably test the ADSL2+ performance, but FRITZ has a fantastic reputation for both speed and stability. As a result, this could be a great high-speed Wi-Fi ADSL2+ modem for gamers… provided FRITZ ditched all the extraneous phone bits. *BENNETT RING* PC

- 802.11ac AND a modem, at last!
- Looks cool
- FRITZ reliability

- So many unwanted phone features for gamers
- Expensive

VERDICT We really appreciate seeing an 802.11ac router with built-in ADSL/VDSL modem, but the phone features are a waste for gamers.

7

WorldMags.net

The HYPER» app is out now!

100% Australian 100% Independent
XBOX PLAYSTATION NINTENDO PC MOBILE
HYPER
READERS' GAME OF THE YEAR
YOUR FAVOURITE GAMES REVEALED
DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION
BIOWARE'S RPG GOES OPEN WORLD
DIABLO III: REAPER OF SOULS
THE EXPANSION THAT REDEEMS DIABLO
MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT
DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER?
INFAMOUS: SECOND SON / CHILD OF LIGHT / YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z
HEARTHSTONE / TITANFALL / METAL GEAR SOLID: GROUND ZEROES
100% Australian 100% Independent
XBOX PLAYSTATION NINTENDO PC MOBILE
HYPER
TRIALS FUSION
TRIPLE A GAME JAM
THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE
CAN THE SINGLEPLAYER LEGEND CONQUER THE MMO MARKET?
SOUTH PARK: THE STICK OF TRUTH / DARK SOULS II / EVOLVE / EA SPORTS UFC / THIEF / GRIM DAWN / FROZEN ENDZONE

GET ALL THE LATEST IN GAMING ON YOUR TABLET

Save time! Receive alerts when the next issue is out!

Save money! Subscribe for even greater savings!

AVAILABLE ON APPLE NEWSSTAND.

▶ Load the Newsstand store and search for HYPER

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

RAM

ADATA DDR3 3100

Feel the need for speed

PRICE $1300
www.adata.co.in

How fast is too fast? According to ADATA, there is no such thing as too fast. The PC3-24800 memory kit from these guys is designed with one aim in mind – to smash overclocking records. We're confident the kit can do it, but you're going to need a mother of a motherboard to keep up with it.

Part of ADATA's premium XPG series of memory, ADATA rates this memory kit to run at a whopping DDR3 3100MHz. Yep, that's just a smidge under the most currently used speed of DDR3 1600MHz. Obviously there have to be sacrifices made to hit these kinds of ludicrous speeds, and the first is the size of each stick. Limited to 4GB per stick, the twin stick kit maxes out at just 8GB.

Secondly, ADATA has had to go with some pretty loose timings to hit a fast overall frequency. To run at 3100MHz, it suggests going with 12-14-14-36, which isn't too bad to be honest. More juice is also required obviously, with the kit demanding 1.65V to hit these speeds. Each stick is also encumbered by a rather large heatsink, and it'll definitely interfere with some of the bigger air coolers on the market.

Unfortunately we weren't able to hit 3100MHz during our testing, as our testbench only officially supports DDR3 2800MHz, which this kit hit with ease. Unless you're running an AMD APU that requires fast memory to improve game performance (In which case you have better things to spend your $1300 on), this kit is really only of use to the tweakers and clockers. It is way too expensive for the rest of us. *BENNETT RING* PC

- Yowsers fast
- Decent timings

- 4Gb per stick
- Expensive

VERDICT If you're looking to set a world record, this could be the memory kit for you.

5

RAM

Crucial Ballistix Tactical Tracer

Memory branding jumps the shark

PRICE $220
www.crucial.com

Are you the kind of sick dude who puts a skirt of neon lights around the edge of his Skyline so that it looks like one of the racers in Fast and The Furious? If that sounds like you, we've got just the memory kit you've been waiting for. The Ballistix Tactical Tracer might not look like much when it's sitting in the pack, but once you've jacked it into a memory slot, get ready for a lightshow that makes Sydney Harbour on NYE look tame.

Packed along the outside edge of each stick are enough LEDs to light up the moon. They cycle through all the colours of the rainbow, and when controlled with the special M.O.D. software can be used to highlight different activities. It could be CPU load, amount of memory used or even to beat along in time to "It's Raining Men" while you're hosting a house party.

Other than these lights, this is a pretty basic memory kit. The twin stick version comes with 8GB per stick, officially rated to run at just DDR3 1600MHz speeds. In this day and age of kits that all hit 2133MHz speeds, 1600MHz just isn't that impressive, especially at this price. Having said that, the kit is XMP rated, though they don't mention which version of the profile is supported.

In this kit's favour, at least the heatsink and LEDs don't add much to the height of the kit, so it shouldn't mess with your CPU cooler. One for the disco bunnies. *BENNETT RING* PC

- So bright and pretty
- XMP support

- Low overclocking potential
- Very expensive

VERDICT Do you like shiny things? It doesn't get much shinier than this.

6

WorldMags.net

Tears up all the rules of FPS

XSHOT

MISSION AGAINST TERROR

Join the International Hit Fantasy FPS Today

Free Download at xshot.com.au

gdo.winneronline.com.au

Glory Destiny

gdo.winneronline.com.au

Coming April 2014

Reveal your spirit and find your destiny!

Explore a unique and charming fantasy world in this chibi-style MMORPG

X-LEGEND

KINGSOFT 大连金山互动娱乐科技有限公司

Games for Windows

WorldMags.net

winneronline.com.au

Winner Online

WorldMags.net

CASE

Fractal Design Node 804

The usually on the ball case-maker may not quite get this latest build right.

PRICE $187
www.fractal-design.com

By and large, Fractal Design is known for making quiet, high-end cases for the serious PC enthusiast. The understated design is perfect for anyone that doesn't feel a powerful PC needs an equally over the top chassis.

The Node 804, though... doesn't seem quite on-song.

It looks great, don't get us wrong. It features a smoothly curved front fascia with a meshed air intake along the bottom, and more mesh on the upper surface. All the controls and ports are on the leading side edge. It's elegant and understated, with a side-window to let you enjoy all the toys inside.

However, it's also really big, almost too big for its Micro-ATX design.

Inside, you do get a lot of cool stuff. Three fans both suck and blow, while the interior boasts a dual-chambered design that keeps drives and PSU on one side, and mobo and video cards on the other. This is great; it makes sure the airflow gets where you need it, and means that a lot of the heat from the drives platters and PSU don't add to the heat from dedicated gaming components. There's a great drive caddy system, and even Velcro straps to tie down PSU cabling securely.

However, we just can't get past the size – in pure volume, it's as big as some ATX cases. The square form factor is a curious choice. Corsair's made some good cases like this in the past, but in this case it just seems over-engineered for its intended hardware. Otherwise it's pretty much exactly everything you could want in a case.

Except for the some of the dust-filters, which can only be accessed if you lift the case off the ground.

It's just hard to think of where a case of this size could fit in.
DAVID HOLLINGWORTH PC

- Great ventilation
- Good interior features

- Sooooo big
- Poor filter placement

VERDICT A great design, but – you guessed it – too large for its own good.

7

MOUSE

Corsair Raptor M40

And excellent budget mouse that pushes the definition of budget

PRICE $59
www.corsair.com

We've never been all that fond of Corsair's budget Raptor gaming range, always preferring the more solid performance of the Vengeance line of keyboards and mice. However, while the last generation of Raptor peripherals were basically rebadged designs that pre-dated Corsair's buyout of the company, Corsair is now releasing its own lower-end designs.

The M40 shares the same multi-panel design ethic as its more serious cousin, the M65, but with lesser hardware specs. The sensor is only rated to 4000dpi, and the switches in the two main buttons aren't quite as precise; the M40 is also missing the dedicated 'sniper' button of the M65. However, for all of that, it's still very usable mouse.

It uses a similar unibody frame, but this one's built of plastic rather than aluminium. It's relatively light, and can be made even lighter with the cleverly placed weights spread about the unit's base-plate. The upper surface is smooth and easy on the hand, while the side-panels feature a rougher surface that is easier to grip, making it great for those who use thumb and little finger to grip their mice. In-game it is a pleasure to use, and easy DPI switching makes it a breeze to move from gaming to desktop, or to switch modes for finicky aiming. Its slick, low-friction feet do exactly what they promise.

Other features include onboard memory and very grippy, weighted mousewheel for control during weapon-switching.

If you're on a budget and looking for a great mouse for FPS enthusiasts, there are few better specced mice, nor as comfortable, on the market. But, ultimately, spend the extra $10 and get the new Vengeance M65. It's definitely worth it. *DAVID HOLLINGWORTH* PC

- Very comfortable
- Solid features for the price
- Precise in game

- You may as well get the M65 for just $10 more

VERDICT A great budget effort from Corsair

8

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

PC & TECH AUTHORITY
TECH ADVICE YOU CAN TRUST
OUTLOOK EXPERT
18 PRO TIPS FOR BETTER EMAIL & ORGANISING
WIRELESS DEMYSTIFIED
WI-FI, BLUETOOTH MIRACAST AND MORE
80 COMPONENTS TESTED
BUDGET BUILDER
HUGE GROUP TEST
51 CPUs · 15 RAM KITS · 14 MOTHERBOARDS
REVEALED: THE BEST BITS FOR A PERFORMANCE PC THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK
FREE DVD
GAME DEMOS:
MOEBIUS
EMPIRE RISING
+ PRIME WORLD
• WINDOWS TOOLS & UTILITIES 13 ESSENTIAL APPS
• INTERNET APPS 11 MUST-HAVE TOOLS
HOW TO:
WORD WIZ: PERFECT DOCUMENT FORMATTING
AVOID: TOP 5 WINDOWS DOMAIN MISTAKES
BUILD A MEDIA PC FOR YOUR LOUNGE ROOM TV
RETRO GAMES
HOW TO PLAY YOUR FAVOURITE OLDIES ON THE PC – FOR FREE!
NEW-AGE MICROSOFT
THE POST-BALLMER BOUNCE AND WINDOWS' FUTURE
AU$9.95 Inc GST
NZ$9.95 Inc GST
ISSUE 199 JUNE 2014

The best reason to buy an iPad

Your other favourite technology magazine now has an iPad edition featuring everything you love in the magazine plus exclusive extras each month including additional photography and video. Change the way you view your tech. Head to iTunes now to download the app.

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

TECH

MENAGERIE

WITH APLOMB

So the worst kept secret in the industry is out, with various NDA breaks showing off the Z97 chipset in all its glory. Things are pretty much stagnant until we get these boards into the labs and give them a good benching.

BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

CPU
AMD FX 6300
$141 *www.amd.com*
It's time to upgrade our AMD chip. Six-cores of updated architecture are just what we need!

MOBO
ASRock 980DE3/ U3S3 AM3+
$107 *www.asrock.com.au*
Our new CPU needs a new ASRock home.

RAM
Kingston DDR3 8GB 1333MHz CL9
$27 *www.kingston.com*
For those times when four just ain't enough.

VIDEO
PowerColor Radeon R9 280X
$349 *www.powercolor.com/au*
1080p performance with all settings on high.

POWER
Cooler Master 500W
$59 *www.coolermaster.com*
Unlike high end PCs, the Budget build doesn't need a lot of juice to get up to speed.

SOUND
Sennheiser HD201 + ASUS Xonar DG
$56 *www.sennheiser.com* *www.asus.com.au*
Headphones plus soundcard – yes!

OPTICAL
Lite-on DVD-RW
$21 *www.us.liteonit.com*
We'd happily retire the drive, but some of you guys still believe in physical media.

STORAGE
Toshiba DT01ACA050 500GB HDD
$55 *www.toshiba.com.au*
Half a Terabyte should handle everything.

DISPLAY
Samsung S24B300H 24"
$175 *www.samsung.com*
Crystal clear 1920 x 1080 resolution.

CASE
BitFenix Shinobi
$64 *www.bitfenix.com*
Nice for the price. This is the little brother of the case used in our Performance build.

KEYBOARD
Tt eSPORTS Challenger
$45 *www.thermaltake.com.au*
Built for PC gamers. Macros, shortcuts, the lot.

MOUSE
Gigabyte M6900
$22 *www.gigabyte.com.au*
A sensor resolution of 3200DPI will make your headshots count.

TOTAL – $1,121

PERFORMANCE

Most of the bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

CPU
Intel 4th Generation Core i5-4670K + Cooler Master Hyper 612 PWM
$270 + $43 *www.intel.com*

MOBO
ASRock Fatal1ty H87 Performance
$119 *www.asrock.com*
Half the price, same performance.

RAM
Corsair CMX8GX3M2 -A1600C9 8GB (2x4GB) DDR3
$69 *www.corsair.com*

VIDEO
Gigabyte Radeon R9 280X
$394 *www.gigabyte.com.au*
Outperforms NVIDIA's similarly-priced cards.

POWER
Corsair 650W VS650
$72 *www.corsair.com*
With minimum removable cables, this overclock-ready PSU delivers!

SOUND
Audio Technica ATH-A500X
$120 *www.audio-technica.com*
These headphones offer very solid quality.

OPTICAL
Lite-on DVD-RW
$21 *www.us.liteonit.com*
This is the one bit of kit that stays the same between most of our machines.

STORAGE
W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung 840 EVO 250GB $96 + $210
www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au

DISPLAY
BenQ XL2411T
$429 *www.benq.com.au*
BenQ's new 24-incher not only looks great, it'll also save your eyesight. Apparently.

CASE
BitFenix Shinobi XL
$151 *www.bitfenix.com*
Just like the beloved Shinobi, but biggerer.

KEYBOARD
Thermaltake Meka G1
$105 *www.thermaltake.com.au*
Might as well go for a premium keyboard.

MOUSE
Razer DeathAdder V2
$44 *www.razerzone.com*
Doesn't bite!

TOTAL – $2141

PREMIUM

Crank everything to Ultra, including your credit card limit

CPU
Intel 4th Generation Core i7-4770K + Corsair H100i Water Cooling Kit
$399 + $180 *www.intel.com*

MOBO
ASUS Maximus VI Hero $285 *www.asus.com.au*
With a new CPU socket comes an entirely new motherboard.

RAM
2 x Corsair Vengeance DDR3 Low Height Kit
$144 *www.corsair.com*
16GB should be more than enough.

VIDEO
2 X Palit GeForce GTX 780
$1190 *www.palit.biz*
We're using NVIDIA for our dual GPU solution

POWER
Silverstone Strider Plus 850W
$158 *www.silverstonetek.com*
A high end PSU to ensure stable overclocks.

SOUND
Creative ZXR + ATH-ADG1
$266 + $279
www.asus.com / audio-technica.com

OPTICAL
Samsung SH-B123A Blu-ray Combo Drive
$89 *www.samsung.com.au*
Blu for you!

STORAGE
W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung SSD 840 EVO 750GB $96 + $649
www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au

DISPLAY
Kogan 30" Cinema Display
$699 *www.kogan.com*
Delivers a pixel-perfect 2560 x 1600 resolution

CASE
Cooler Master HAF Stacker
$228 *www.coolermaster.com*
The Voltron of PC cases-ish.

KEYBOARD
Razer Black Widow + Razer Orbweaver
$93 + $120 *www.razerzone.com*
Mechanical keys... drool...

MOUSE
SteelSeries Sensei
$69 *www.steelseries.com*
Amazing performance without paying through the nose.

TOTAL – $4,944

WorldMags.net

THE BEAST
When overkill is barely enough...

CPU

Intel 4th Generation Core i7 4770K + EK-KIT H30 360 HFX Cooling Kit
$399 + $349
www.intel.com
www.pccasegear.com.au

HEADPHONES + SOUND CARD

Creative Sound-Blaster ZXR + Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones
$208 + $279
www.asus.com
www.audio-technica.com

MOBO

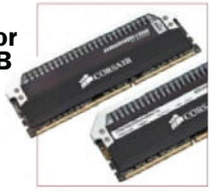
Gigabyte G1. Sniper 5
$550
www.gigabyte.com.au
This high end Z78-based board has an excellent 3D BIOS tha makes overclocking a breeze.

STORAGE

OCZ 240GB RevoDrive 3 X2 + OCZ Vertex 4 520GB + 2 x WD 1TB Velociraptor
$469 + $799 + $552
www.wdc.com / www.ocz.com

RAM

Corsair Dominator Platinum 4 x 4GB DDR3 2400MHz
$429 *www.corsair.com*
It doesn't get much faster than this.



DISPLAY

Panasonic AE8000
$2800
www.panasonic.com.au
Beautiful 1920 x 1080 gaming. Unfortunately you won't be able to do 3D gaming at anything higher than 720p due to the limitations of HDMI 1.4.

VIDEO

3 x ASUS GTX 780 Ti
$2442
www.asus.com.au
Welcome to crazy town, population 200fps.

CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos II Ultra Tower $366
www.coolermaster.com
It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet. The compartmentalised interior ensures everything runs ice-cool.

POWER

Thermaltake Tough Power 1500W
$339
www.thermaltake.com.au
1,500W should be plenty for the three GPUs running alongside an overclocked CPU, as well as the storage within.

INPUT DEVICES

Razer Mamba Wireless Gaming Mouse + Xbox 360 USB Wireless Dongle + Xbox 360 wireless controller
$179 + $40 + $40
www.razer.com / www.xbox.com

KEYBOARD

Razer BlackWidow Ultimate Stealth Edition + Razer Orbweaver
$199 + $120
www.razerzone.com
You name it, this keyboard can do it.

STEERING WHEEL

Fanatec CSR Elite with pedals and shifters $1199
www.fanatec.de
There's nothing better than "Germangineering" to deliver the most precise force feedback around.

SPEAKERS

Paradigm Cinema 110 with dual subwoofers and Paradigm monitor center channel + Pioneer VSX-921 amp
$3299
www.eastwoodhifi.com.au

JOYSTICK

Logitech G940
$399
www.logitech.com
With a force feedback joystick, separate throttle and dedicated rudder pedals, the G940 is perfect for any flight sim.

OPTICAL

Samsung SH-B123A Blu-ray Combo Drive
$89
www.samsung.com.au
Putting in a Blu-ray drive allows your PC to double as a powerful media box.

COCKPIT

Obutto oZone with Buttkicker gamer 2 and TrackIR 5 Pro
$1100
You're going to need somewhere to mount your wheel and joystick, and the Obutto frame is a favourite of ours.

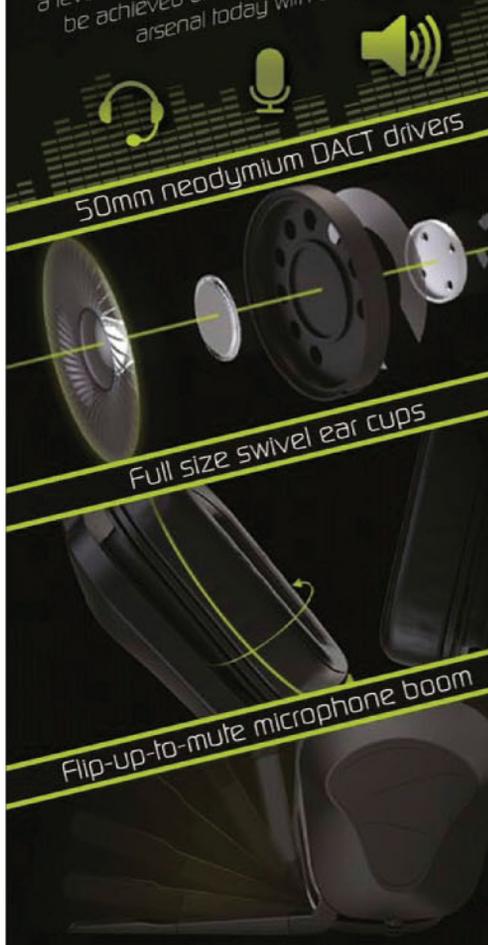
TOTAL – $16,646

MIONIX
LIGHT-YEARS AHEAD OF THE GAME - MIONIX.NET

NASH 20
GAMING HEADSET

Sound. Comfort. Design.

The NASH 20 is a circumaural analog stereo gaming headset, with fully adjustable ear cups and memory foam cushions - all constructed with a level of precision and accurancy that can only be achieved at Mionix. Augment your gaming arsenal today with a set of NASH 20s!



AVAILABLE FROM:

www.pccasegear.com
www.mwave.com.au
www.scorptec.com.au
www.ple.com.au
www.gamedude.com.au

DISTRIBUTOR Anyware
PHONE 1300 269 927
WEBSITE www.anyware.com.au

MOUSE MATTERS

There is no one perfect solution when it comes to mouse mats, or any peripheral. **JOHN GILLOOLY** uses a mid size 5mm fabric on rubber mat to explain why.

WorldMags.net

A few years ago at Computex, Taiwan's annual festival of all things PC, I was meeting with Roccatt, one of those largely European peripheral manufacturers, founded by a couple of ex Pro CounterStrike players who realised that it was either move on from that drip feed of tournament prize money or learn wtf a MOBA is (I generalise, but, hey).

As we were leaving they offered me and my colleague a mouse mat, pointing to a wall of the things. Cloth ones, plastic ones, metal ones, different thicknesses, different surfaces on top of the rubber. It was daunting and intimidating trying to work out what I actually liked in a mat, and what each actually did.

The humble mouse mat never used to be that complicated when you would use whatever the biggest one you had received as a giveway was. Or your favourite magazine. Or your desk. Before the days when we gave a toss about poll rates and dpi, when the choice was ball or laser.

Then things changed, a few companies like Razer, Func and Everglide started doing 'gaming' mouse mats, along with the promise that a few milliseconds advantage will make up for the various wonky bits in between the mouse and your eyeballs. They were certainly more pleasant though, and in the case of everglide, so well engineered and true to its naming that the company effectively disappeared because no one ever needed to replace them. Apart from some heat related warping, which I'm sure is fixable, my Half-Life logo everglide is still a fantastic mousing surface, well over a decade after purchase.

In the end my decision at Computex left me with a mid-size, 5mm thick rubber/foam mouse mat. Has it changed my gaming compared to the slightly thinner, I'm going to say large, rubber/foam model from a brand since forgotten that I used beforehand? Not that I've noticed. Of course, my days of twitch headshotting counterterrorists are behind me - I look for number of buttons on a mouse rather than response rates and the like nowadays.

It really begs the question of whether or not mousemats are largely psychological. After all, they gave birth to an industry where 'gaming grade' products are often way over engineered for all but the most savant of prestigers. But it also begs the question of whether it actually matters?

Ultimately its all about personal preference, about what works for you. I was going to use my flatmate as an example until he just made some derogatory comments about no one ever reading this, but he has the infuriating ability to just use his glass desktop for mousing. Of course, it means he is very limited in his choice of sensor, but its how he rolls.

All of those tangible bits that we interact with ultimately come down to a personal choice. The only exception is that no one in

Ultimately it all comes down to you, not the brand

the history of anything, ever, would voluntarily want to subject themselves to the gentle scratching metal of a Razer Ironclad. Not even my other old flatmate who was so metal he actually liked the sound of a MRI machine.

Just yesterday I listened to friend and colleague Ben Mansill describe how he hated everything I love about my favourite keyboard. Both of our opinions were valid (well, mine was obviously MORE valid), but the simple fact is that we like different things in our peripherals.

I have monster hands, which means that I interact with my mouse in a completely different way to most, Ergonomics just arent when it comes to me. So it means I prefer

"My days of twitch-headshotting counterterrorists are behind me. Give me a mouse with lots of buttons instead"

different things from my rodents to, say, David Hollingworth, who loves to spend his gaming time huddled in a high vantage spot popping heads through a scope. I'm more interested in having all my abilities close to my thumb.

Just recently Corsair sent in various versions of its K70 Keyboard (PC PowerPlay's recent Keyboard of the Year). It was a rare chance to try the same design with different switches, in this case Cherry MX Red, Brown and Blue. Everyone on the team had a different preference for switch, some liked the noisy, others (like me, I'm a sucker for Cherry MX Reds) liked linear actuation while others like the tactical feel of the browns.

Again, its not easy to know what is the right one for you until you try. This isn't so much ergonomics as the fact that if you are investing in a mechanical keyboard why should you compromise on feel. At those prices do yourself a favour and get the right switch. It isn't easy to get a good comparison, but remember that the actual Cherry MX switches are the same between brands, and it is the feel of them that is the most important, so its easy to translate. Just be wary of the new wave of non-Cherry made switches, some are ok, others not so much.

So the take-away. There are certainly good and bad products out there. But don't feel that, when faced with a wall of choice, there is one true champion. Not only are there many, many great products being made, but there is probably a solution just for you. If you are shopping around, try and get your hands on something before committing to it, as much as we try to incorporate wide opinions into reviews, my one bit of guidance is that you will always find something best for your needs, and when you are talking about some of the most used pieces when gaming, you want the best. PC

WorldMags.net

STATE OF PLAY

WorldMags.net

92 Play critique and creation

How does crossing the line from reviewer to developer change one's opinion of both pursuits?

96 Extended Memory

Civilization throughout Civilisation

WorldMags.net

Why Football Manager Controls My Life

DAKODA BARKER likes generating his own stories through one of the great un-games

Football Manager knows it is a time sink. When you load a save game, it shows a message based on "addictedness rating"; I've been told to order pizza so I don't die of starvation, that sleep is for sissies, and that flipping my underwear inside out is a great way to avoid washing clothes. I've won the FA cup, only to realise it's 7am and I haven't gone to sleep. I am twelve seasons and 370 real hours into my job as manager of Grimsby Town FC, but I'm not hooked because I'm a football fan.

One of my best friends describes Football Manager as "like FIFA, but without actually playing." In some ways that is accurate; the gameplay in Football Manager is effectively just playing around with colourful Excel spread sheets. Most people would find that incredibly dull, but it isn't the gameplay engages. It is, believe it or not, the narrative.

Obviously a sports sim doesn't have a consistent, central narrative. Indeed, at face value there is no narrative at all. But it is this distinct lack of constructed narrative that allows Football Manager to unlock its full story-telling potential. Every event – every new signing, every match, and every press conference – is part of the narrative. Or maybe "narratives" is a better word; there are a series of intertwining stories unfolding: my journey as a manager, the club's rise and fall, and the careers of each player. Each of these feeds into the others, creating an incredibly complex tale.

My first attempt at playing Football Manager resulted in me being fired from three clubs in as many seasons. Not the glorious start I wanted, but then again, I did have to lie about my age before they would even let me manage a team. While I started over for my current save file, I still count those very unsuccessful times as part of my personal meta-narrative. They were my uneasy first steps as a manager before I found my feet and became the premiership-holding, Champions Cup-winning, miracle-making manager that I am today.

One of the most emotional moments for me is when a player retires. Their personal story as a player comes to an end, and Football Manager presents you with that brief narrative: what clubs they played for, the successes and glory they obtained, and whether or not they plan to stick around as a coach or staff member. Perhaps I am simply too invested in my team of fictional footballers, but Football Manager allows me to create and enjoy my own stories based on the successes and failures of my team.

But this is not something unique to Football Manager. Part of the reason simulation games are so popular is that they allow you to experience a slice of life different to your own, complete with the ups and downs, in a neat little package. Maybe you have a bad harvest in Farming Simulator, or missed a delivery in Euro Truck Simulator. Maybe the opposite is true and you're rewarded with a huge pay day. Either way, you get to experience a journey with variation and, if you're particularly invested (or hopelessly passionate about video games, like me), it can be almost as enjoyable as a crafted narrative.

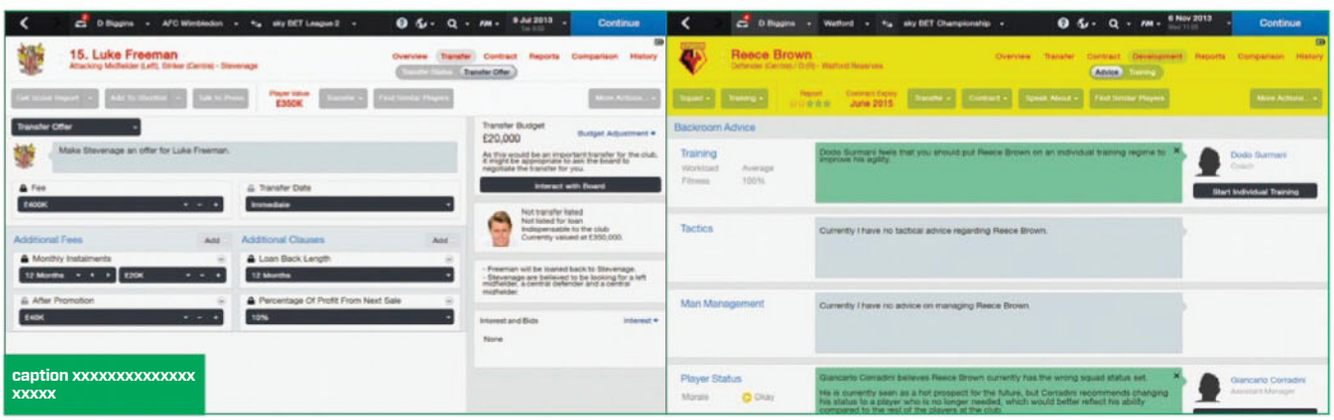
> "It is the lack of constructed narrative that unlocks the storytelling potential"

While simulation games are an obvious place to find this player-driven story mechanic, it does exist in other types of games, including those that do actually have a pre-existing narrative. Since its release, I've read many people's experiences playing Journey, with each one being unique and characterised by the other players they met and "interacted" with. Even though Journey has its own story – understated as it may be – the real experience is created by the players.

The main advantage of video games as a format in terms of player-driven narrative like this is instant gratification. It takes an entire season to find out whether my team wins the league or fails dismally and gets relegated; in Football Manager, with a little dedication and energy drinks, I can play an entire 9 month season in an evening. All the experiences – the clashes with rivals, buying and selling players, successes and defeats – are condensed into a short period of time, resulting in an emotional rollercoaster ride – and a lot of sleep deprivation.

Hours of my life aren't pumped into Football Manager because it has compelling gameplay or outstanding graphics. Football Manager isn't taunting me about my level of addiction because it has an engrossing tale of good conquering evil, or anything of the sort. I'm not even the type of rabid fan you would expect to play a game like this; I watch maybe one A-League match a year when I can catch a broadcast, I don't follow any English Premier League teams, and before playing Football Manager I had never even heard of Grimsby Town FC.

But what Football Manager does have is a framework that allows me to craft my personal tale. I am the manager of (formerly fifth-tier) English Premier League side Grimsby Town FC and the No. 1 best Australian manager of all time – and I, personally, made all of that happen. PC



caption xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxx

PLAY, CRITIQUE AND CREATION

Meghann O'Neill, having recently made a small, musical contribution to a Kickstarted game, reflects on reviews, insight and enjoyment, then learns more from experienced industry professionals.

Recently, the relationship between appreciation for games and the creation of game content is something I've reflected on considerably. As well as knowing what I enjoy playing, and increasingly being able to articulate why, I've reviewed games for PC PowerPlay with an eye to the expectations of its wider audience for nearly 7 years.

If you read Generation XX, you'll also know I've been making slow, but steady, progress with amateur game projects of my own. I've created a standalone module for Dragon Age: Origins, placed in Bioware's creative writing challenge, won Storynexus' Worlds of the Season competition and used Twine and Unity to showcase a model of "aleatoric game music" I've been devising from scratch.

Incredibly, over the last six months, I contributed combat music to a game that was Kickstarted for $150,000, but I'll return to that. I'd first like to share some experiences from my previous life; teaching high school, classroom music.

My point centers on music practical examinations for year twelve students. They conform to specific and expected mores, from the examiners' perspective. For example, if the performer knocks the microphone stand over, because she's singing too enthusiastically, the examiners will unanimously agree, over an outstanding morning tea, that the overall presentation was lacking. Similarly, a pattern often emerges where examiners critique the students playing the instrument they are personally trained in differently; either more negatively or more positively. What is at play here? Jealousy? Favouritism?

Not in most cases, no. In order to be properly biased you have to have a reason to care. It happens due to simpler factors. The pianist-examiner says to the saxophonist-examiner, "Wow, that sax was out of tune," but the saxophonist-examiner had adjusted her aural expectation and was focusing on other aspects of the performance. Why? Every note on the saxophone is out of tune. A couple, notably middle C# and D, are notorious. Only experienced players will adjust their embouchure (mouth position) minutely for every note to compensate.

Similarly, if you ask the pianist-examiner why the piano performance was so out of time, she might say, "Don't be silly. I thought the student coordinated the three parts between the two hands really well." Her insight into the instrument led to a different appreciation. All the examiners then shrug and take their homemade lamingtons and bagged billy tea back to the acoustically optimally positioned table to continue examining. Unless there is a massive discrepancy in scores, it all works out fairly enough. For the students performing, there is usually at least one examiner who knows their instrument.

This is in contrast to feedback I've received on my games reviews; the score is too high, too low, incorrect, or the review has focused on aspects that are irrelevant, too shallow, too niche, and so on. I score/review games as conscientiously and as thoughtfully as I once scored/ critiqued music examinations. There are two differences, though. Firstly, no-one is buying a year twelve music performance. Also, there is a marked difference in recognition for the uniqueness of appreciation.

> "The relationship between playing/ reviewing games and contributing to them is odd"

This comparison raises many questions for me. Is the value of games criticism then limited to providing information to the consumer, if the reviewer has little or no insight into design? Or, if the reviewer is also an experienced designer, does this detract from the relevance of the information provided to paying customers who just want to play and enjoy the game? Sure, the saxophonist-examiner has the more relevant feedback for the saxophonist-performer and woodwind pedagogy as a whole, but the pianist-examiner is entirely fair when she says, "People don't want to listen to a performance that is out of tune."

The idea that someone who begins reviewing games without specialised knowledge, like me, and unlike how I know the saxophone, could inherently "make better games" has also always seemed a bit arrogant and ridiculous in my mind. Regardless, this is precisely why and how I began devising the audio model that I successfully pitched to the Kickstarted game. (I won't tell you its name because that feels a bit weird. The sudden and confusing conflicts of interest are something else that the slow transformation from games reviewer to developer brings. And, I very much hope PCPP reviews the game without realising my involvement.)

Simply, being a backyard programmer, I cobbled together "aleatoric variations" of music I had composed and produced myself. The game's programmer even called my code "nifty." Even though I only made three combat tracks with five variations each, alongside an experienced film composer, it was still very challenging. I grappled with software, worked within structures that were difficult to anticipate/plan for, cried on a couple of more experienced shoulders and just kept iterating. I even attended Global Game Jam in Sydney and made music for seven games in 48 hours, for the practice. (And, I won the jam's special award, which was a pot of jam.)

Has making games transformed me into a different or more lenient reviewer? Has reviewing games given me a head start on development? I really don't know. I just like to think I've become more specialized overall. Like, why do browser games have simple, often uninspiring, sound design? After working with Twine, I could certainly explain it.

One way or another, the relationship between playing/ reviewing games and contributing to them is an odd one. Consequently, I decided to find more perspectives on this and two very knowledgeable reviewer/ developers kindly provided PCPP with the following interviews.

Tom Francis wrote for PC Gamer, full time, for 9 years, as well as reviewing games for Edge and PC Format, before releasing Gunpoint as game designer, level designer, sound designer, programmer, and writer. He is currently working on his second game; Heat Signature.

What prompted the transition from games journalist to developer?

I always loved armchair design, coming up with ideas I had no hope of making. I didn't think it was possible to make a really exciting game without a huge team until I played Spelunky. Spelunky uses clever random generation to make a basic looking platformer endlessly replayable, and it's made in a beginner's tool called Game Maker. It showed me that you can make something great if you have good enough ideas. Over three years of weekends, my first test project gradually turned into Gunpoint.

What about Gunpoint can be tied back to your experience of reviewing games?

Reviewing sometimes meant playing games with awful stories, and the ones that really bothered me were the least skippable ones. So I made Gunpoint's story instantly skippable, even important decisions.

I'm also intimately familiar with how infuriating checkpoint systems can be, and long hours of replaying the toughest section of an incredibly frustrating game boiled that down to a hard rule; never force the player to repeat anything. So Gunpoint saves every five seconds, and keeps all of these save games so you can skip back as little or as far as you want.

But, probably the biggest influence reviewing had on how I develop is prioritising. As a player, you know whether you like or dislike something, but only when you're reviewing it are you really forced to isolate and articulate why. I have a clear sense of what matters most in the final game, and I use that all the time to decide what to work on next. That means even if the menus are hideous, I'm not going to spend any significant time on them until that's truly the most important thing wrong with the game. I've never marked a game down for its menus, so that time is almost always better spent elsewhere.

What do you most enjoy about the games you play? Has this changed since you've started making them?

My favourite games tend to give you very flexible or versatile abilities, then put you in a world with consistent rules that interact with each other. Deus Ex isn't a great shooter, but you have a huge range of weapons and tools that all do meaningfully different things, and the game never forces you to use one or prevents another from working artificially. And in Spelunky, anything you could reasonably lift is something you can pick up, anything you can pick up you can throw, anything that's thrown can hit things, and anything that hit things can hurt it. So you might throw a rock to blow up an explosive crate, but the blast throws it back, the rock hits you on the head, the force knocks you onto an altar, and being unconscious on an altar counts as being sacrificed to the spider god Kali, which kills you and produces a pair of springy shoes as thanks for your offering.

I don't think that's changed since I started making games, but ironically I seem to spend less time playing them. In some way making a game is like playing the most complex and creative puzzle game ever made, and once you learn how to play, it's incredibly engrossing. So when I have the energy to delve into something complex, I want to develop. And when I don't, I'm usually too burnt out to play anything that requires a lot of learning and mental effort. I have a much lower tolerance for games that waste my time with repetition, grind, or frustration.

What have you learned specifically from the limitations of the process, when making Gunpoint/Heat Signature?

I think the biggest lesson I learned from Gunpoint was that hand-crafting content is very inefficient for an indie. I spent three years of weekends, on and off, to make a game that's three hours long. And because it's hand-crafted, there's diminishing returns to re-playing it.

So every one of the four or five game ideas I have for the future features procedurally generated content. Heat Signature is a game about flying up to randomly generated spaceships, docking with their airlock, and sneaking aboard. I've only been working on that for four months, but you can already play it forever. The galaxy is infinite and the ships come in effectively endlessly different configurations.

Greg Kasavin worked at Gamespot for more than 10 years, after running Arcadia Magazine and working for NewType Gaming Magazine. He has worked on Command and Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars, Command and Conquer Red Alert 3, Spec Ops: The Line and then Bastion, after joining Supergiant Games in 2010. They are currently finishing work on Transistor. Kasavin's responsibilities include writing, narrative design and level design, as well as audio integration.

Prior to making games yourself, what tended to characterise a review game as either exceptional, or lacking?

I don't feel like I can draw generalizations. Each game is different. When I play I perform some sort of mental calculus around how well I think it is executing against the scope of its ambition. Many of my favorite games are not particularly ambitious in their scope, just extraordinarily well crafted for what they are. Or they are just weird and interesting to me. What I want out of a game is specificity. Why does it exist? It should either be the best at what it does, or distinct in some specific respect. I love games that leave a lasting impression on me, through their mechanics, characters, and worlds. I really admire games that have a strong sense of internal consistency across all aspects of the presentation. In other words, I like the sense that every aspect of a game was made with thought and care.

What most captures your attention about the games you play now?

On one hand I love well-tuned, mechanically complex games where there is a significant execution challenge that comes with becoming proficient. I love fighting games, real-time strategy games, and more recently Dota 2 for these reasons. On the other hand I love games with a strong narrative that take advantage of the strengths of the medium to tell their stories. I have always loved good RPGs for this reason. Other than that, I really appreciate games that have a specific personality or point of view, so over the last couple of years, smaller games like Papers, Please and Hotline: Miami have left a strong impression on me.

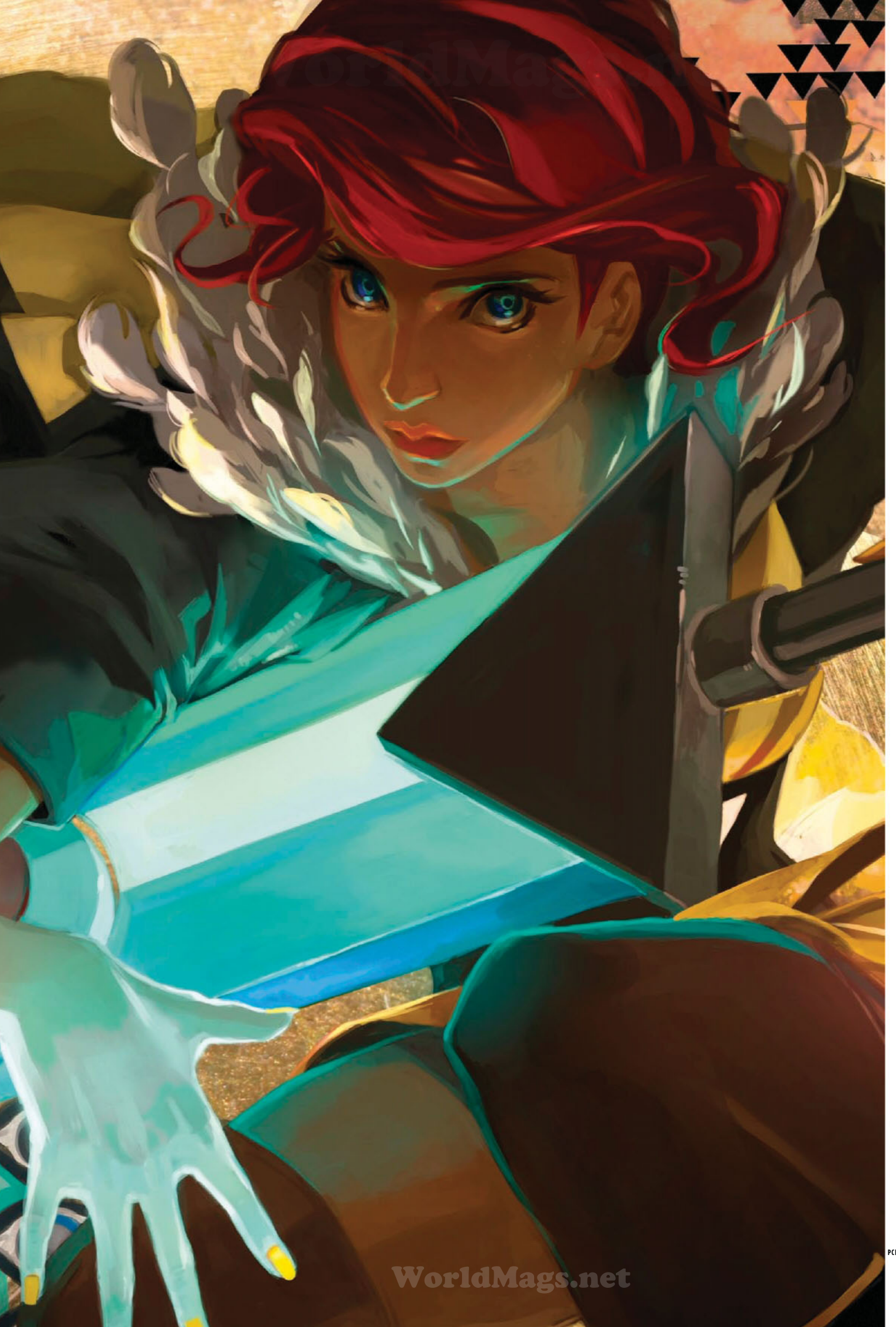
How did your experience as a reviewer influence decision making when contributing to and directing a game's development?

Having been a game critic for a long time gave me a strong basis on which to evaluate design decisions. If we come up with an idea, there's a good chance I can think of a game that tried something similar, which can make for useful reference. Similarly, if there is some design problem we're trying to solve, I can often think of games that had to do that too. I also just know what I like and have developed some intuition. This all comes from having played a lot of games and thought about them critically, as it's one thing to know whether or not you enjoyed a game but another thing to really understand how all the design choices in it contributed to your enjoyment.

Can you describe for us some special aspect to Transistor that the player without specialised knowledge may be otherwise unlikely to appreciate?

Transistor is an action RPG so the tactical combat is a major focus of the gameplay. However, it was very important to us to also include some expressive actions in the game that had no real gameplay consequence, and were simply there to give players a greater sense of agency in the world. One example is that our main character Red can hum a song at almost any point in the game, to the beat of whichever music is playing at the time. It has a contemplative feel and the music I think is quite beautiful, thanks to Darren our composer and audio director, and the vocals from Ashley Barrett. I don't know for sure that players will discover or use this much during the course of play but I love that it's there and think that for some players, at least those with a disposition similar to mine, it may make a big difference.

WorldMags.net



WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

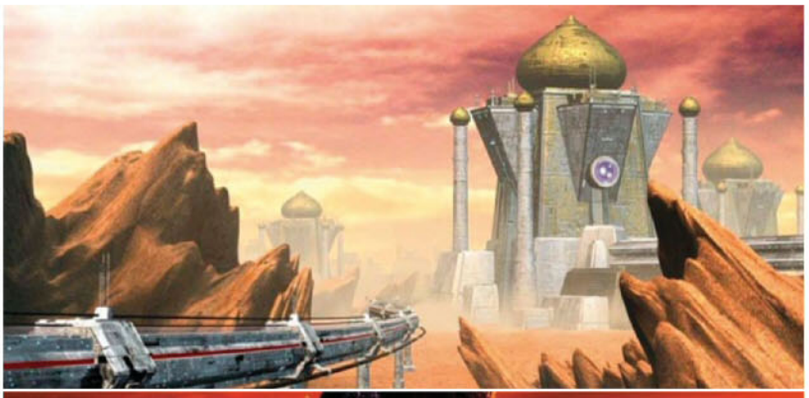
WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

THE FINAL FRONTIER

DANIEL WILKS is an semi-dormant intelligent hive-mind

The story of why Sid Meier's name appears on the box of all of his games is a pretty famous, if somewhat divisive one. Meier's version of the story differs from that of Bill Stealey, one of his business partners from his early days at MicroProse. According to Meier, the idea to include his name on the cover of his pirate sim, Sid Meier's Pirates (and every Sid Meier game thereafter) came from Stealey, who suggested that Meier may want to include his name in the title to let fans of his earlier flight sims know it was one of his creations. According to Stealey, however, the idea came from none other than legendary coked up comedian Robin Williams, who suggested that Stealey put Meier's name on the cover of some games to promote him as a star.



The turbulent history of the Civilization franchise is less well known. In 1980, Francis Tresham created the Civilization boardgame and published it through his own company, Hartland Trefoil. A year later Avalon Hill, a company specializing in strategic boardgames obtained the license to sell the Civilization boardgame in the US. A decade later, MicroProse, the development studio and publisher founded by Sid Meier and Bill Stealey released Civilization after first licensing the right to use the Civilization name from Avalon Hill. In 1993, MicroProse was bought by Spectrum Holobyte but the companies remained separate, leading to the 1996 release of the critically acclaimed Civilization 2. In that same year, Spectrum Holobyte consolidated the two companies under the banner of MicroProse and then proceeded to fire the majority of the original MicroProse staff, prompting Meier, along with Brian Reynolds (the designer of Civ 2) and composer Jeff Briggs to jump ship and form Firaxis.

In 1997, Activision acquired the rights to the Civilization name from Avalon Hill and soon after, in conjunction with Avalon Hill attempted to sue MicroProse for trademark infringement. In response to the lawsuit, MicroProse bought Hartland Trefoil, making the company the sole owner and developer of Civilization PC and board games. In 1998, MicroProse countersued Activision and Avalon Hill for false advertising, unfair competition, trademark infringement, and unfair business practices. The case was eventually settled out of court and resulted in Avalon Hill having to pay MicroProse $411,000 and Activision licensing the Civilization name from MicroProse so they could develop the middling Civilization: Call to Power. Less than a month after the settlement, Hasbro bought both MicroProse and Avalon Hill, consolidating the Civilization brand under the Hasbro banner.

In 2001, Infogrames bought Hasbro Interactive and with it the rights to the Civilization franchise. Changing the name of Hasbro Interactive to Infogrames Interactive, the French company published the Firaxis developed Civilization III. In 2004 Take-Two bought the rights to the Civilization franchise from Infogrames and in 2005, shortly after publishing the Firaxis developed Civilization IV, purchased the studio, once again consolidating the brand under one roof. The hot potato nature of the franchise illustrates two things – how a strong brand can stand up to outside forces and more importantly, how a simple title can change everything.

Despite being comprised of the remnants of MicroProse, the original developers of the Civilization PC series, Firaxis games did not have the license to the Civilization franchise, effectively segregating the developer from the most famous and successful game they were affiliated with. Rather than work on a licensing deal or trying to sign back on with a company who had fired the majority of the original MicroProse staff, the heads of Firaxis instead decided to create a "Civilization style" game with a similar look and feel to the best selling franchise without actually being an official part of the series. That game was, of course, the critically acclaimed and cultishly adored 1999 turn based sci-fi strategy sim, Alpha Centauri.

Despite being similar to Civilization at heart, the game wasn't saddled with a set Earth-bound history and instead took off from where Civilization ended, with human colonists heading to a distant Earth-like planet to found a new way of life. Taking inspiration from the great philosophical science fiction novels of the 20th century, such as Frank Herbert's seminal classics, The Jesus Incident and Dune, Red Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson and Slant, The Forge of God and Anvil of Stars by Greg Bear, Alpha Centauri gave characters control of a human faction trying to terraform and inhabit the planet Chiron, an Earth-like body orbiting out nearest neighbouring star, Alpha Centauri, all the while questioning the ethics of aggressive alien colonization, and terraforming an alien ecosystem to meet the needs of an invasive species. When it was released, Alpha Centauri, despite being a standalone title was hailed as being the best Civilization yet released. For many people, the PCPP crew included, it remains the seminal turn based world sim. PC

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

NEXT MONTH

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG
PC PowerPlay
#229 ON SALE
JUNE 19

WorldMags.net

msi®

SUPPORTS intel inside CORE intel inside CHIPSET Z97

GAMING G SERIES

JUST GAME!

MOTHERBOARD

Z97 GAMING 9 AC

Xtreme Audio DAC

Z97I GAMING AC | Z97M GAMING | Z97 GAMING 3 | Z97 GAMING 5 | Z97 GAMING 7

NSW

MSY Technology	Tel: 02-9648 4116	msy.com.au
ARC	Tel: 02-9748 8322	arc.com.au
Digital Star	Tel: 02-8748 6888	digitalstar.com.au
iibuy	Tel: 1300 10 3030	iibuy.com.au
IT Destination	Tel: 02-9211 8696	itdestination.com.au
J&W Computers	Tel: 02-9726 2818	jw.com.au
The Laptop Factory Outlet	Tel: 02-9892 0000	lfo.com.au
Online Computer	Tel: 02-9211 0898	onlinecomputer.com.au

VIC

PC Case Gear	Tel: 03-9560 2122	pccasegear.com.au
MSY Technology	Tel: 03-9560 2288	msy.com.au
Budget PC	Tel: 03-9541 9000	budgetpc.com.au
Centre Com	Tel: 03-8311 7651	centrecom.com.au
Scorpetc Computers	Tel: 03-8561 3206	scorptec.com.au
BCC Computers	Tel: 03-5227 6888	bcccomputers.com.au
CPL	Tel: 03-8542 8688	cplonline.com.au

QLD

Gamedude Computers	Tel: 07-3387 1500	gamedude.com.au
MSY Technology	Tel: 07-3217 9070	msy.com.au
Computer Function	Tel: 07-3270 4477	computerfunction.com.au
FTC Computers	Tel: 07-3344 7100	ftc.com.au
Computer Alliance	Tel: 07-3321 3200	computeralliance.com.au
Gocomp	Tel: 07-3722 5150	gocomp.com.au
Umart Online	Tel: 07-3369 3928	umart.com.au

WA

MSY Technology	Tel: 08-9344 1002	msy.com.au
Austin Computers	Tel: 08-9202 0100	austin.net.au.
PLE Computers	Tel: 08-9309-4771	www.ple.com.au

SA

MSY Technology	Tel: 08-8212 1656	msy.com.au

Wowhd.gg.net

gaming.msi.com

MSI Australia

WATCH_DOGS™

HACKING IS OUR WEAPON

"BEST ACTION GAME"
IGN.COM BEST OF E3 2013

MAY 27TH 2014

WiiU version to be released later in 2014

:: www.watchdogs.ubi.com ::

R 18+ RESTRICTED
References to sexual violence and sex scenes

PS4 PS3 XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE XBOX ONE PC DVD Wii U UBISOFT

©2014 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Watch Dogs, Ubisoft and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. "PS", "PlayStation" and "PS3" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PS3" is a trademark of the same company. Trademarks are property of their respective owners. Nintendo, Wii and WiiU are trademarks of Nintendo.